

# Lilith

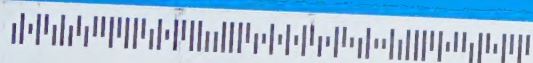
independent, Jewish & frankly feminist

ZZ

What's in  
a Hyphen?

And Other  
Questions in  
Naming  
Ourselves and  
Our Children

S



BXNNTNYL \*AUTO\*\*SCH 5-DIGIT 94708  
#01096965# SPRING 14 P1 LIL  
GRAD THEOLO UNION-LIB SERIALS  
2400 RIDGE RD  
BERKELEY CA 94709-1212

46 181

PROCESSED

FEB 03 2012

GTU LIBRARY

PLUS

Battle for the  
Nation's Wombs:  
Abortion in Israel

Five Seders,  
Kaleidoscopically

Feminist  
Photographers  
Take to  
the Streets

# New!

From the Reuben/Rifkin Jewish Women Writers Series, a literary collection devoted to fiction and memoir by Jewish women the world over.

**WHATEVER IS CONTAINED  
MUST BE RELEASED**

**My Jewish Orthodox Girlhood,  
My Life as a Feminist Artist**

HELENE AYLON

\$24.95 PAPER • 978-1-55861-768-1

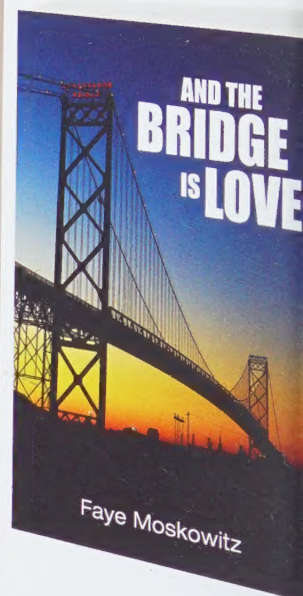
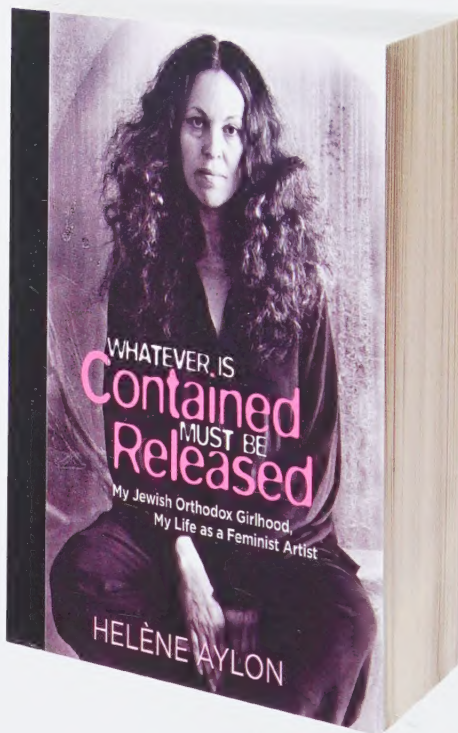
Helène Aylon was a good Jewish girl raised in Orthodox Brooklyn, married to a rabbi, and the mother of two when her world split apart. A widow at thirty, she became a major American artist whose work over nearly five decades deals in images about war and peace, women's bodies, and women and Judaism.

**AND THE BRIDGE IS LOVE**

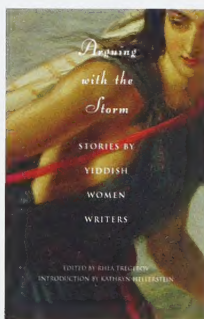
FAYE MOSKOWITZ

\$12.95 PAPER • 978-1-55861-770-4

"What a feast of a book! Moskowitz gives us her piercingly tender observations about unlikely friendships, transgressive love, disappointing plants, and sacred Jewish rituals of the kitchen."—Susan Weidman Schneider, editor in chief, *Lilith* magazine



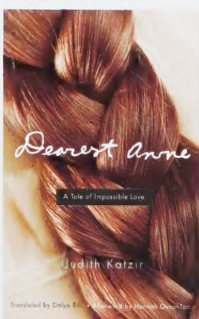
**ALSO IN THE SERIES:**



**ARGUING WITH THE STORM**

EDITED BY RHEA TREGEBOV

\$14.95 PAPER • 978-1-55861-558-8



**DEAREST ANNE**

BY JUDITH KATZIR

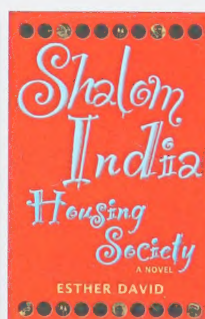
\$15.95 PAPER • 978-1-55861-575-5



**DREAM HOMES**

BY JOYCE ZONANA

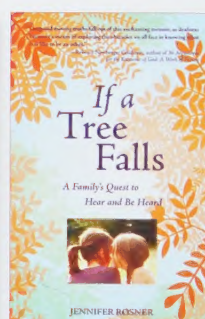
\$15.95 PAPER • 978-1-55861-573-1



**SHALOM INDIA HOUSING SOCIETY**

BY ESTHER DAVID

\$15.95 PAPER • 978-1-55861-596-0



**IF A TREE FALLS**

BY JENNIFER ROSNER

\$16.95 PAPER • 978-1-55861-662-2



**HOLD ON TO THE SUN**

BY MICHAL GOVRIN

\$16.95 PAPER • 978-1-55861-673-8

**THE FEMINIST PRESS**  
AT THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK  
FEMINISTPRESS.ORG



HADASSAH-BRANDEIS  
INSTITUTE

A partnership of the Hadassah-Brandeis Institute and the Feminist Press, the Reuben/Rifkin Jewish Women Writers Series will delight and engage, and keep you wanting more . . .

Visit us online at [feministpress.org](http://feministpress.org) or [brandeis.edu/hbi](http://brandeis.edu/hbi)

# Lilith

vol. 36, no. 4 • winter 2011–12

In the Garden of Eden, long before the eating of the apple, the Holy One created the first human beings — a man, Adam, and a woman, Lilith. Lilith said, "We are equal; we come from the same earth."

10

## Abortions in Israel

by Elana Maryles Sztokman and L. Ariella Zeller

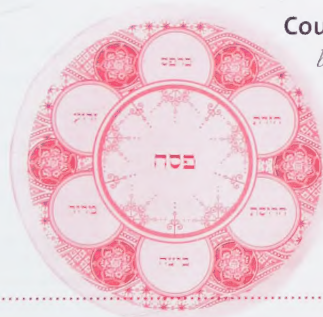
Lilith reporters demonstrate how a society's pro-natalist assumptions undercut women's control over their own bodies. They spotlight the ways anti-abortion forces akin to those in America are trying to win hearts and minds in the Holy Land.

20

## The Radical Camera

by Rebecca Shaykin

From the 1930s to the 1950s, a New York camera club unlike any other welcomed women photojournalists who challenged and changed an artform.



24

## Take Five: Passovers, Kaleidoscopically

Meditating on the past, future and eternal present, women open the door.

### Blessings of a Deep Freezer

by Hadar Dubowsky Ma'ayan

### Elijah at Tenth and South

by Ellen Schecter

### My Daughter's Exodus from Kunming, China

by Nancy Cohen Israel

Plus, *Miriam's Cup: A Ritual for Adoptive Mothers of Chinese Daughters* by Rabbi Susan Schnur

### Skyping the Seder

by Robin A. Harper

### Counting in Seders

by Joanne Jacobson



32

## Naming the Matriarchy

What we call ourselves when we're hyphenates, when we're grandmothers, when we're Jews.

### My Hyphen

by Anna Schnur-Fishman

### So, Baby Schultz, What Will You Call Me?

by Susan Gelfman

### Que(e)rying the Matrilineal Principle

by Susan Goldberg

3

## From the Editor

Susan Weidman Schneider on women taking charge of rituals and our bodies.

4

## Voices: Jewish Women Speak Out

Honoring Alice Shalvi • Jewish female execs give advice • Women's role in Occupy Wall Street • Baltic Journal: Women shaping Jewish life in Vilna • And more...

15

## Father & Sons

poetry by Eve Lyons

16

## Stronghold

a short story by Naama Goldstein

38

## Reviews

Two Egyptian Jewish émigrés recall a paradise lost • Ilana Kurshan on beauty-based discrimination • A dirt-phobic pioneer grandmother • and there's more...

46

## Happening

compiled by Naomi Danis

Your indispensable guide to being Jewish & female.

48

## Under-the-Neath

by Alisha Kaplan.



***"Money is the bio-fuel that sustains transformative change."***

—Nessa Rapoport

Lilith thanks these generous donors, whose tax-deductible contributions in the last three months help sustain the magazine.

#### ANGELS

Nan Bases, Frances Brandt, Barbara B. Dobkin, Terry Satinover Fagen, Deborah Fuller, Jane Gottesman & Geoffrey Biddle, Francine Klagsbrun, Natalie Pelavin, Elaine Reuben, Marci Rosenberg, Schnur Family Philanthropic Fund, Ronda Small, Rabbi Margot Stein, Mildred Weissman, Rose Zoltek-Jick

#### SUSTAINERS

Susan Askanase, Sharon Pikus, Rabbi Judy Shanks

#### FRIENDS

Janet Aserkoff, Ann Bear, Nancy Berman, Sheryl Bronkesh, Marcia Burnam, Leslie Dolin, Shulamith Elster, Ann Falchuk in honor of Julie Falchuk & Kim Jackson, Shari Ades Falchuk, Claire Wolf Gelfman, Michelle Gluck, Marion Gribetz, Shirley Joseph, Jamie Kotler, Lynn Kroll, Sondra H. Levenson, Jacqueline Levine, Michael J. Hirschhorn & Jimena P. Martinez, Julia Mazow, Jennifer Miller, JoAnn M. Orlinsky, Ruth Rose-Jacobs, Rabbi Sandy Sasso, Harriel Seiler, Pneena Pearl Sheps, Marcia Silberstein, Jacqueline Simkin, Francine Smilen, Ellen R. Snyder, Lois Zoller

#### DONORS

Sandra Block, Sara Bucholtz & Rabbi Adam Feldman in honor of Eve Coulson, Mary R. Goodman, Naomi Graetz in honor of Rabbi Ariella Graetz Bar Tuv, Rikki Horne, Marilyn Jorrie, Nancy Lewis in honor of Eve Coulson, Isabelle Mayer, Rebecca S. Pearlman, Rabbi Marion Shulevitz, Bonnie Stone, Janet Eskolsky Taubin in honor of Rona & Johanna Schneider-Freiser, Mira Van Doren, Judith G. Weisblatt, Aileen Zarin

Would you like to see your name in the next issue of Lilith? It's easy. Just make a contribution. You can send your check to Lilith, 250 W. 57 Street, #2432, New York, NY 10107 or online at Lilith.org. Thank you!

Lilith is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. All contributions are tax deductible to the full extent provided by law.

# Lilith

Editor in Chief  
**Susan Weidman Schneider**  
susanws@lilith.org

Managing Editor  
**Naomi Danis** naomi@lilith.org

Senior Editor  
**Susan Schnur** susanschnur@lilith.org

Assistant Editor  
**Sonia Isard** sonia@lilith.org

Fiction Editor  
**Yona Zeldis McDonough**

Poetry Editor  
**Marge Piercy**  
Book Reviews  
**Ilana Kurshan** ilana@lilith.org

Advertising  
**Ellen Jacobs**

Art Director  
**Lindsay Barnett** lindsay@lilith.org

Photographer  
**Joan Roth**

Interns  
**Jillian Finkelstein**  
**Alexandra Halpern**

#### Board of Directors

**Frances Brandt, Eve Coulson, Barbara B. Dobkin, Deborah Fuller, Heidi Gralla, Yvette Gralla, Michal Hart Hillman, Natalie Pelavin, Marci Rosenberg, Susan Weidman Schneider, Mildred Weissman, Rose Zoltek-Jick**

#### Contributing Editors

Alice Sparberg Alexiou, Sarah Blustain, Nina Beth Cardin, Elaine S. Cohen, Rachel Cowan, Sue Levi Elwell, Reena Sigman Friedman, Rela Geffen, Blu Greenberg, Judith Hauptman, Francine Klagsbrun, Rachel Kranson, Harriet Lerner, Anne Lapidus Lerner, Audrey Friedman Marcus, Alana Newhouse, Shana Penn, Judith Plaskow, Nessa Rapoport, Danya Ruttenberg, Sandy E. Sasso, Amy Stone, Melanie Weiss

#### Lilith

250 West 57th Street, #2432  
New York, NY 10107  
phone: 212-757-0818 fax: 212-757-5705  
info@Lilith.org www.Lilith.org

Newsstand price: \$4.95 Canada: \$6.95  
Individual subscriptions: \$25.97/4 issues  
Institutions: \$30/4 issues Outside U.S., add \$13/year (U.S. funds only) Single copies: \$7, prepaid (includes postage)

Change of address or delivery problems: Send label to Lilith, Dept. LIL, P.O. Box 3000, Denville, NJ 07834, or call (800) 783-4903 or (212) 757-0818.

Retailers: To carry Lilith, call (888) 254-5484 or e-mail info@Lilith.org

LILITH (ISSN 0146-2334) is published quarterly by Lilith Publications, Inc., 250 W. 57th Street, #2432, New York, NY 10107-2420. Periodicals Postage Paid at New York, NY and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to LILITH, P.O.B. 3000, Denville NJ 07834-3000

Copyright © Lilith Publications, Inc. 2011. All rights reserved under international and Pan-American conventions. Associate member American Jewish Press Association. Lilith occasionally makes its mailing list available to organizations or publishers. If you do not want to receive such mail, please send label and request to Lilith Department LIL, P.O. Box 3000, Denville NJ 07834.

Printed in Canada.



**NYSCA**  
New York State Council on the Arts



Become a fan of **Lilith Magazine** on Facebook, or follow **LilithMagazine** on Twitter.



**Y**ou can hardly believe it. Huge ads on the outside of Washington D.C. buses proclaim “DC Doin’ It” alongside a photo of a sexy-looking couple nuzzling and the bold proclamation that for both male and female partners, the new female condom is designed to “tease, please and protect.” The thrust (forgive me) of this bold and innovative campaign to protect women from getting AIDS is on pleasure rather than panic, with the “protection” benefits mentioned but not underscored. The campaign, run by the D.C. Department of Health and an AIDS coalition, plus a pharmacy chain, wants to empower women to take charge of their sexual behavior and its consequences, with vivid descriptions of the “fc2” condom in full public view. I was stunned, and I read the bus ads every time I saw them last month. (You can check them out at [dcdoinit.com](http://dcdoinit.com).)

One reason I found these ads so powerful, even aside from the fact that they looked more like soft porn than like the typical

don’t usually wear their kippot on the street. The kippot were, rather, a way of proclaiming that they were entitled to be fully participating Jewish women among other Jews. I’ve seen similar

delighted appropriation of the traditional kippah-wearing by women at meetings of Conservative Jews, but the striking thing about the kippah prevalence at the Reform meetings was that it seemed a much smaller percentage of the men present were kippah wearers. For the women, the kippah was a signifier that they were serious about their Judaism, asserting this with a powerful visual reference.

A much less subtle example of women’s asserting the right to be present and full participants in public spaces is the willingness of Israelis to demonstrate against exclusion of women’s bodies and voices from some town squares in places like Beit Shemesh, near Jerusalem. This is where ultra-Orthodox right-wing religious factions have declared that women and girls should walk on separate

## *Female condoms, kippot, and public protests.*

public-space advertising, is that I had just finished editing the article in this issue about how generously the Israeli government supports fertility treatment and how scant is the discourse around contraception and abortion. But, in reality, the power of those D.C. bus ads is that they—and the female condoms they’re giving away free—provide women with a way to assert agency over their own sexual activity, encouraging both pleasure and protection.

Now please bear with me for a minute. What’s coming next may sound like a pretty unlikely yoking of events. I’ve been observing two other behaviors not typically spoken of in the same context as female condoms. They are other examples of women taking charge of their bodies in public spaces. The first: at the recent biennial convention of Women of Reform Judaism, the sisterhood arm of the Reform movement, about 700 leaders in their synagogue communities gathered for lectures, discussions, song, study, prayer, celebration and the thrill of having President Barack Obama address them. Here’s what surprised. In a movement where ritual usually takes a second seat to social justice activities, many of the women wore kippot. These women were wearing kippot not just at prayer services, but throughout the conclave. A non-Jewish woman journalist covering the meeting asked me if this was how the women announced themselves as Jews on the street. But no, I said, these women

sidewalks from men, stay out of public areas, refrain from having their voices heard singing in public, and more. Thousands of Israelis marched in protest against this gender segregation, even on some public buses, and against violence or threatened violence toward women (including against girls attending a not-Orthodox-enough day school). The horror—and the ugly absurdity—of a female soldier being told by an ultra-Orthodox man that she should sit at the back of the bus is only a small part of the story. What happens to women’s bodies is a bellwether. “We are fighting for the soul of the nation,” President Shimon Peres said. And the National Post newspaper in Canada described the demonstrations as a clear opposition to “the coercive encroachment of patriarchal ultra-Orthodox values.”

Female condoms. Kippot. Public protests over gender injustice. These are all physical manifestations of equal status. The links aren’t so farfetched. You get it. What is harder to get, and what really shocks, is that well into the fourth decade of the women’s movement these examples are still worthy of note.

*Susan Weidman Schneider*  
Editor in Chief



Traditionally the voice of a Jewish woman was not to be heard in public, lest it arouse men. These pages are for news about Jewish women in our own strong voices.

## Honoring Alice

**Alice Shalvi**, savvy and outspoken Israeli feminist educator, founder of the Israel Women's Network, winner of the Israel Prize and many other honors in the country where she has been living for six decades, turned 85 this year. She was honored by the New Israel Fund at an event in New York in November.

### Alice speaks:

**On Israel's former president Moshe Katsav's** conviction on rape charges: "Sexual harassment is simply endemic in Israeli society."

**On being called up** to the Torah for an *aliyah* for the first time at age 53: "I was in tears. I realized I was having the experience 40 years later than every Jewish male."

**On the first Jewish feminist conference** in Israel, in 1984, where Lilith editor in chief **Susan Weidman Schneider** and others had gathered to discuss *Jew as Woman, Woman as Jew*: "I had never thought of how excluded women were in Judaism. The three houses of Judaism were closed to women: Beit Midrash, Beit Knesset, Beit Din."

**On her "click" moment**: She was turned down as potential dean at Hebrew University with the words, "But you're a woman!" "Being a woman meant I was unqualified!"

"I started asking people, 'How does being Jewish inspire or influence where you give your money?' And the resounding answer was there was no correlation. ... We are plagued as a generation by a picture in our minds of what it looks like and sounds like and feels like to be Jewish—Federation happy hours, pro-Israel rallies and High Holy Days services. But our generation is actively choosing not to opt into those activities in big numbers... The Jewish community needs to work to connect the dots between the values that Millennials are already living by and how those values are Jewish."

**Rachel Cohen Gerrol**, a Birthright Israel alumna and founder of The Nexus: Global Youth Summit, an organization for young philanthropists. Quoted in *The Jewish Journal of LA*, November 9, 2011.



**Ruth Dayan**, widow of Israeli Minister of Defense **Moshe Dayan**, famed for his bravery and his eyepatch, mother of former Knesset member **Yael Dayan**, and founder of the once-renowned Israeli artisan shops Maskit:

“I am a proud Israeli. I’ve lived through every war, endured every moment of suffering, but I never stopped believing in peace. I lost friends and family members. I’m a peacemaker, but the current Israeli government does not know how to make peace. We move from war to war, and this will never stop. I think Zionism has run its course... Israel today is not a dream, it is a country in a lot of trouble. It’s a

high-tech society that communicates through iPad, iPhone, and Facebook instead of having children talking to each other.... I am really proud of the 300,000 protesters [during the summer of 2011] who demanded social justice. I say go on and include the Palestinian issue in your agenda! That is also about justice and our future.”

Quoted in The Daily Beast, October 30, 2011, interview with Rula Jebreal.

## Women Occupy Wall Street / Occupy Judaism

If the Shekhina delights in synchronicity, it is no accident that Occupy Wall Street picked up speed just in time for the High Holidays. Starting with Kol Nidre, what quickly became Occupy Judaism linked a Jewish call for justice to the 99 percent.

Occupy Judaism—the Jewish presence at Occupy Wall Street in at least 10 U.S. cities, plus Toronto and London—has not lacked for female images: a picture of Emma Goldman in the small Chabad-issued pop-up sukkah in Manhattan’s Zuccotti Park; women joining with men in conducting Kol Nidre services; women dancing with the Torah during Occupy Simchat Torah; women equally involved with men in decision making meetings of Occupy Wall Street; women and men bringing their kids to participate.

Occupy Kol Nidre was initiated by a social media maven, the self-described “post-Orthodox” **Daniel J. Sieradski**. He was quick to help others shape Occupy Judaism events across the country. Thanks to Facebook, Twitter, Google groups and Tumblr, things happened fast. Anyone clicking into the action was welcome.

There was nothing cookie cutter about each city’s approach. New York’s Kol Nidre was a traditional egalitarian service geared to those literate in Hebrew. The Sukkot celebration a week later, organized by the predominantly female Jews for Racial and Economic Justice (JFREJ), featured Jewish musician and creator of Jewish Chicks Rock, **Naomi Less**. According to JFREJ Executive Director **Marjorie Dove Kent**, four “tough broads” from JFREJ figured out how to stay warm and dry in the rain-drenched Zuccotti Park sukkah after the men abandoned the halakhic hovel.

Dove Kent described the movement’s non-hierarchical organization as “such a relief. ... The element of competition is removed. ... Men and women take on and express leadership in different ways.” Like Occupy Wall Street, Occupy Judaism “makes room for both.”

In Philadelphia, visual artist **Zoë Cohen** thinks of “being Jewish in Philly,” including Occupy Judaism, as “being led by women—inclusive, open, creative, participatory,” with locally ordained women Reconstructionist rabbis. She said, “Doing the service outdoors as part of a protest movement made my Kol Nidre—bringing a spiritual element to economic reform, healing the world, healing ourselves.”



Naomi Less, with guitar, leads JFREJ sukkot celebration in New York’s Zuccotti Park.

Toronto-born songwriter **Chana Rothman** feels the Occupy Judaism High Holiday services embody “the true energy of the American Jewish experience, people deeply invested in this country.” Not your traditional rebbitzin, Rothman, whose husband is a rabbi in a Reform synagogue in suburban Philadelphia, has been bringing their one-year-old son to Occupy Philly and wrote the song, now streaming online, “Wall Street Main Street.”

In Los Angeles, Rabbi **Aryeh Cohen**, associate professor of Rabbinic Literature at American Jewish University, described how his 14-year-old daughter, eager to be part of Occupy LA, told him, “Abba, it’s been a long time since I’ve been at a demonstration.”

Among the Jewish artists shaping the Occupation, **Andrea Hodos**, creator of Moving Torah Workshops and wife of Aryeh Cohen, was invited to bring her educational performance skills from Occupy Judaism to the Occupy LA General Assembly.

Just as Jewish rocker Less tells women and girls, “Don’t wait to be invited,” women felt completely comfortable jumping into Occupy Judaism to shape this new connection between American Judaism and grassroots American political action.

AMY STONE

## Baltic Women Talk About Being Jewish

*If you can do Rome in a day, it's not unthinkable to do the Jewish history of Vilna in 24 hours. This is the Old Town where the venerated Gaon taught in the 18th century; these are the streets the Jews were forced into in the 20th. Those sweet gargoyles on a smooth coral façade? The remains of a vibrant Jewish theatre. That kindergarten? The location of a renowned Jewish library. At this corner, the Nazis installed a gate to lock in the ghetto's residents, and this is the spot from which Jews began their march to death in the fields outside Vilna, in open pits at Ponar, on barges in the Baltic Sea.*

Little more than a century ago, Vilna was known as the "Jerusalem of Lithuania." Some 40% of its 154,500 residents were Jewish. Today, about 4,000 Jews remain in all of Lithuania. How do they cope with their country's Jewish past and present? I began to find out during a short visit there recently.

**Fania Brantsovsky**, 89, is the librarian of the Yiddish Institute of Vilnius University. She was a member of the communist youth movement in her teens; in the ghetto, she joined the underground. On September 23, 1943, slipping past truckloads of armed Germans, she headed into the countryside seeking Jewish partisans.

"First I went to say good-bye to my family," Fania remembers. "Mama gave me all she had. Boiled peas, a piece of chocolate, a lipstick and a nice blue shirt."

The next day, the Vilna ghetto was liquidated. Fania walked through Lithuanian fields and villages for two tense days before locating the partisans. She was given a rifle, then an automatic gun. For almost a year she survived in the forest, in crude shelters of earth. "We blasted trains and bridges, sawed down telegraph poles, placed explosives in the enemy's equipment," she recalls. "We shot and killed them. Yes, I killed them. Easily. With each and every shot I took revenge for my dear ones and thousands of others."

She returned to Vilna after its liberation by the Soviets with her "true love," a fellow *partizaner* named Mikhail. Hailed as heroes for having fought the fascists, they had great expectations of Lithuania's

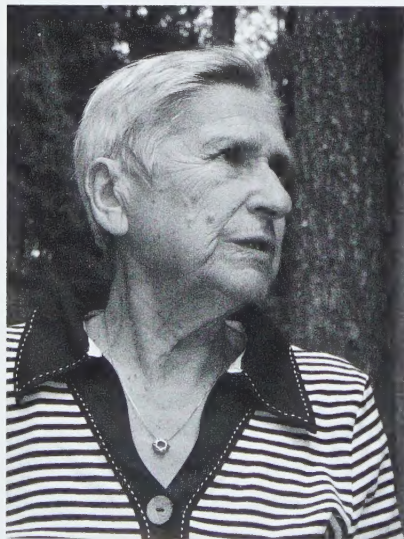
post-war regime. "We believed in our country," declares Fania, "in socialism, peace and justice." History, however, is fickle. Their faith in Soviet power was dimmed in the '50s by its anti-Semitism, the Doctors' Plot, and threats to Mikhail. Half a century later, Lithuania regained its independence, and in 2008 Fania confronted another historic about-face: a Lithuanian campaign against Holocaust survivors—herself among them—who had escaped the ghettos and "committed war crimes" in the anti-Nazi resistance. Only in the past year has international pressure halted the investigation and derailed the campaign.

An icon of Jewish survival, Fania still goes to Ponar frequently with schoolchildren, foreign dignitaries, and tourists re-connecting to their past. Most of the ghetto's inhabitants, her relatives included, were shot there. "The 100,000 or more Jews who are buried in these pits cannot tell their story. As long as my feet carry me, I will come here to tell it."

Born in 1945, stage designer and artist **Alexandra Jacovskyte** is a generation younger than Fania. "During Soviet times, we knew little about the Shoah," Alexandra observes. But she, and half her classmates, always knew they were Jewish. She had many friends who "didn't marry Lithuanians, didn't assimilate." Most of them eventually made aliyah.

Alexandra, though, had been taught that one's "national origins" were irrelevant. Lithuanians and Jews alike were brought up as Soviet citizens. "Nevertheless, even in independent Lithuania

From left: Fania Brantsovsky, Ruta Bloshtein and Alexandra Jacovskyte.



PHOTOS BY BARBARA GINGOLD

Fania Brantsovsky:

"When we met up with the partisan unit, its commanding officer asked us a few questions. A beautiful blonde, who looked Lithuanian, was sitting next to him during our interrogation. When he suggested we join his unit, the woman objected: 'I will not let Jewish girls join your unit!' I was shaking from the insult. Did we escape the ghetto just to fall into the hands of this anti-Semitic woman?"

We later found out that she herself was Jewish. The morals in this partisan unit were tenuous, and she was worried about us innocent Jewish girls. However, the partisans treated us like their sisters. It wasn't like some of the other units..."

today, where I am a full Lithuanian citizen, I am not Lithuanian by origin—I am still *zyd*, a Jew." Alexandra pauses. "When applying for a passport, Lithuanians now can choose to specify their national origins, Lithuanian or Jewish. I write, 'I am a Jew'."

Despite signs to the contrary, such as a neo-Nazi demonstration in Vilna last March, Alexandra maintains there is no anti-Semitism there today. She says she feels totally comfortable in contemporary Vilna. Her ex-husband is Lithuanian; her daughter "feels half Lithuanian, my son feels very Jewish." Alexandra seems unenthusiastic about her son's choice, about his attending synagogue, but grants that there is a sense of belonging among Jews.

"I felt it too," she confesses, "when I came to Israel the first time with my father in 1990." A smile warms her face when talking about her former classmates in Israel. "Of course we're in touch, we're like relatives!" she says. "They are happy in Israel. They are patriots." Then she adds, a bit wistfully, "I came to visit Israel four and a half years ago. It was very beautiful. Like being at home."

Israel actually was home for a while to **Ruta Bloshstein**, a religious woman who works at the Taharat HaKodesh Synagogue, the only one in Vilna open for prayers. Her 40-something face is sad, filled with stories that can't be told during a brief encounter in the synagogue's dim vestibule. "I lived in Petach Tikva for five years," she says in fluent Hebrew. "First as a housecleaner, but then I learned Hebrew and got a job at a health clinic." Her two children were small; bringing them up alone, in a foreign language and culture, was too much for her, and she returned to Lithuania. Now she is, as far as she knows, Vilna's only Orthodox woman.

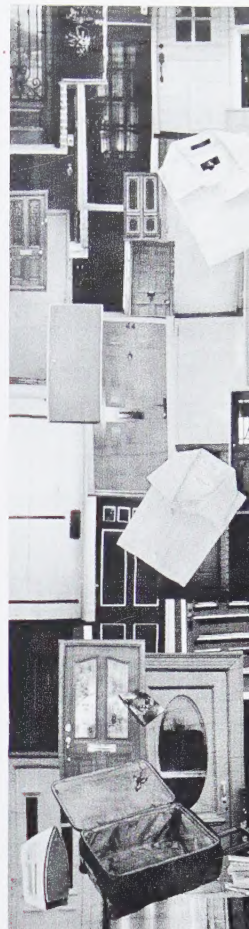
"Write down that I'd like to go back to Israel," she says. "Write that I'd like to start another family there." With a glimmer of hope in her eyes, she closes the door of the synagogue.

BARBARA GINGOLD

## Art Against Homelessness

"As a fiber artist, I tell stories through my quilted wall hangings and fabric sculptures. So when I started speaking with homeless New Yorkers, I knew that I had to find a meaningful way to tell their stories through art. That's how Temporary Shelter was born. Temporary Shelter is an installation piece that takes the shape of a sukkah, also a temporary shelter. Each of the panels tells the story of a homeless individual in one of New York's faith-based shelters."

**Heather G. Stoltz**. Learn more at [www.sewingstories.com](http://www.sewingstories.com).



## Consciousness-Raising Blogs?

Back in the seventies, feminists touted the slogan "the personal is political," arguing that women had been trained to dismiss their own struggles as personal matters with no greater meaning. If women could share stories, they would find patterns. They could be allies instead of rivals. Blogs and social networks "are our version of consciousness-raising groups," says **Shelby Knox**, 25.

EMILY NUSSBAUM, New York Magazine, October 30, 2011.

## Listen Up! Jewish Female Execs Give Advice

"I think women too often give up their identity in a man's world and believe they'll only be successful if they're close to what men are or what men expect them to be... I don't want to feel like I have to fit into a male mode to be this sort of successful industrialist. I take pride in the fact that I can be all woman in a man's world. And as you may have noticed, I am all woman."

Lynn Tilton, *New York Magazine*, April 10, 2011.

"The men were getting ahead. The men were banging down the door for new assignments, promotions, the next thing to do, the next thing that stretches them. And the women—not all, most—you talked them into it. 'Don't you want to do this?'"

Sheryl Sandberg, *The New Yorker*, July 11, 2011.

"In one's relationship with dogs and with a newsroom, a generous amount of praise and encouragement goes much better than criticism,"

Jill Abramson, *New York Magazine*, October 24, 2011.

"The Venn diagram on musical, Yiddish and queer leads to a very small shaded area, but they live in it. This is à la carte Judaism. Or you could do a different frame, and it's à la carte queerdome."

Sarah Kay-Lacks in the November 25, 2011 *New York Times*, speaking about Schmekel, the "raucous klezmer-core punk band made up of '100% trans Jews'." Extra tip of the hat to former Lilith intern **Simcha Halpert-Hanson**, Schmekel's drummer.



CHAD BAKA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

## Ruth Calderon's New Vision for Jewish Learning

Just about everyone seems to have her vision for the State of Israel these days, but it's hard not to feel pretty convinced by the one **Ruth Calderon** has articulated and worked for all of her life: the Bible, the Talmud, sacred stories and ongoing interpretations—these are the cultural inheritance of *all* Jews, and Calderon is insistent that they grasp hold of it. Calderon is part visionary, part scholar and teacher, part public persona, known in Israel for her television

show, *HaCheder*, on which she interviewed famous Israelis about ancient and modern religious texts. (It certainly does speak to Calderon's charisma and drive, and to the unique role of Judaism in Israeli culture, that this sort of television program could be remotely categorized as "popular.")

With an M.A. and Ph.D. in Talmud from the Hebrew University, Calderon has been bringing a fiercely egalitarian ethic to

Jewish learning for decades. In 1989, she launched the Elul Beit Mi-drash in Jerusalem, with Jewish learning open to men and women, and that ethic lives on in Alma: The Home for Hebrew Culture. Not quite a university but more than an educational center, Alma—run by Calderon since she founded it in 1996—seeks to "acquaint Israelis with the wealth of Jewish heritage." Jewish learning is expansive, and so is Calderon's vision for it in a modern Jewish state.

"Jewish texts are not only for the Orthodox," she repeats again and again, and Alma's comprehensive curriculum certainly proves this, applying modern psychology and literary analysis to ancient texts.

Alma also hosts an annual *tikkun leil shavuot*, an all-night learning extravaganza at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, which in recent years has hosted sessions by famous scholars, politicians, and musicians, and has become an enthusiastically trendy event. Calderon's presentations at this *tikkun* are always so packed that the overflow crowd fills the museum's hallways.

Alma, like the other projects of Calderon, is centered in Tel Aviv, where she lives, the city she affectionately calls "the only total urban Jewish space in the world." It's the perfect home for Calderon's dreams of a secular, Jewishly educated and Jewishly invested home.

MELANIE WEISS



PHOTO COURTESY OF ALMA

## Letter from Jerusalem: Hunger in the Holy Land

This summer, as mass protests over the high cost of living swept across Israel, my family lived and ate like Americans. While staying in my parents' home in New York, we consumed large quantities of everything from strawberries to salmon simply because we could. We can't buy some of our favorite foods in Jerusalem, where we've lived for many years—not because they're unavailable, but because they're too expensive.

While it's reasonable to have to pay more for imported products, even many homegrown Israeli foods are now well beyond our means. Despite the close proximity of farms in Israel, a 2-liter bottle of Tropicana-style orange juice costs \$6, while a tiny yogurt sets you back \$1.25.

Since the start of the recession we've been on the lower end of middle class and extremely frugal. Even so, after paying our mortgage, tuition fees, utilities, and the rest, we have to dip into savings to purchase out-of-season fruits and vegetables, or "luxury" items like rice milk (almost \$5/quart) and whole wheat bread (\$3.50 a loaf). And we have to think twice before inviting Shabbat dinner guests, knowing there won't be many leftovers.

Although we're able, thankfully, to provide our children with an adequate amount of nutritious food—we shop in the *Mahane shuk* and the cheapest supermarkets—hundreds of thousands of Israeli kids aren't so lucky. Even with a GDP per capita of \$29,500 in 2009, Israel has "one of the highest poverty levels" in the western world, and "one of the highest levels of inequality," **Shlomo Swirski**,

academic director of the Adva Center think tank in Jerusalem, noted in a recent report. Israel, Swirski said, is a classic case of a country whose macroeconomic indicators are thriving, "but most of whose households are not invited to the end-of-year celebration."

A quarter of Israelis live below the poverty line, including 800,000 children, according to the National Insurance Institute.

### *A quarter of Israelis live below the poverty line.*

All too often, the disabled, the elderly (especially Holocaust survivors), single moms, and heads of large families must rely on public assistance and charitable institutions like soup kitchens, meal programs and shelters.

"No one is starving in Israel," **Joseph Gitler**, founder and chairman of Leket, Israel's largest food bank and food rescue operation is quick to emphasize. "It's much more akin to western-style poverty," where people are forced to skip meals or purchase food that is cheap but not necessarily nutritious.

Gitler, whose organization expects to distribute this year 18 million pounds of fresh produce, 1.4 million sandwiches and hundreds of tons of staple foods to organizations that serve the poor, emphasized that "food insecurity" (the inability to consume nutritious food on an ongoing basis) isn't a problem just for the poor. "A large percentage of this summer's social protesters were working people," Gitler said of the 75 percent of Israelis who earn no more than \$1,700 a month. But after paying the rent and filling up the tank (\$60

in a compact car), "there's very little left for certain fruits and vegetables."

**Moshe Justman**, an economics professor at Ben Gurion University, said there is no simple way to narrow the gap between the "Start-Up Nation" crowd and other Israelis.

"You could raise taxes for the rich and provide greater subsidies for the poor, but this would have consequences as well,"

Justman said. "The very rich may decide to withdraw their money from Israel and emigrate, while giving generous welfare payments is a disincentive to work. Having a better educational system will narrow gaps, but will take a long time."

At a late October press conference to jumpstart a new round of public protests, 80-year-old Holocaust survivor **Ruth Krieger** shared her financial woes. "My entire family, all of them are gone," Krieger said. "I know survivors living without water and electricity and no one helps them. There's no one who comes and knocks on the door to ask, 'Ruth, do you have enough to eat?'"

The high price of food and housing has also hit younger Israelis very hard, "26-year-old **Stav Shaffir**, a protest leader, told me. "Israel isn't like the U.S., where healthy food is more expensive but not necessarily exorbitant. Here in Israel, you have to work around the clock to afford the necessities. After that, who has the time or energy to cook?"

MICHELE CHABIN



### Paula Hyman, 1946-2011

**Paula Hyman**, a pioneering historian of modern Jews, published "*My Life as a Radical Jewish Woman*," in 2001. Without its subtitle, "Memoirs of a Zionist Socialist in Poland," it could stand as an apt characterization of Hyman herself.

The Yale University historian chose to edit the English translation of Puah Rakovsky's Yiddish memoir because she sensed a kindred spirit whose feminism and dedication to Jewish education, Zionism, family and community paralleled her own commitments. In doing so, Hyman, who died of cancer December 15 at age 65, found a way to marry her two passions: Jewish history and feminism.

Hyman wanted to reclaim Jewish women activists of yore for contemporary Jews as part of her lifelong mission to challenge received ideas about leadership, values and ways of doing things in the United States and Israel. Her work ultimately transformed Jewish historical scholarship by bringing gender analysis into its mainstream. The Hebrew translation of Hyman's 1995 book, "Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History: The Roles and Representation of Women," helped coin a new Hebrew word for "gender." And her two-volume "Jewish Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia," published in 1997, opened up the field of Jewish women's history.

Read more of Deborah Dash Moore's tribute: [www.forward.com](http://www.forward.com).

# ABORTION IN

## WHEN THE NATION ENTERS THE WOMB

by Elana Maryles Sztokman and L. Ariella Zeller

**W**HEN HOLLYWOOD ACTRESS NOA TISHBI returned home to Israel for a visit recently, the local press badgered her about starting a family. “Only in Israel do people get into my womb,” she replied. Tishbi’s rejoinder provided a succinct commentary on the invasive discourse about women’s bodies that pervades conversation in Israel.

Israeli culture places a high premium on babies and families. This country has the highest per capita use of in-vitro fertilization in the world. IVF procedures are free and almost unlimited, a policy that certainly provides welcome assistance to people struggling to conceive, as well as to single mothers by choice and other aspiring parents who want to have children outside of conventional family structures. Government-subsidized HMOs spend some \$57 million a year on fertility treatments, one of the costliest policies of the health care system.

Fertility is clearly valued, but family planning is not. Motherhood is supported and encouraged, but non-mothering women are culturally and economically marginalized. “It seems there is provision for women’s special reproductive health needs only to the extent that their role as mothers is reinforced,” wrote Carmel Shalev and Sigal Gooldin in a 2006 report in the journal *Nashim*. “A complex combination of factors, including identification with the collective goal of fighting the ‘demographic threat’ (that the country’s Arab population might eventually outnumber the Jews); the need to make Jewish babies, particularly in the wake of the Holocaust; and the threat of losing a child in war or in a terrorist attack are all said to have influenced Israel’s pro-natalist culture,” Yael Hashiloni-Dolev also wrote.

The culture’s view of women’s bodies plays out in particular in the abortion experience. On the surface, women in Israel have an easier time with abortions than their American counterparts. There are no threats of clinic bombings, no political pressure to overturn women’s basic freedoms, and no need to travel far, as some American women must do. Most abortions are legal in Israel, with an estimated 20,000 legal abortions a year, according to the Central Bureau of Statistics. But they are not always simple to obtain.

### THE ABORTION PANEL

Israel’s 1977 Abortion Law legalized abortion under any one of five conditions: (1) the woman is under 18 or over 40; (2) the fetus has a serious mental or physical defect; (3) the pregnancy resulted from forbidden relations such as rape, incest or adultery;

(4) the pregnancy threatens the woman’s physical or mental health; (5) the pregnancy threatens the woman’s economic stability. The fifth criterion was abolished in 1980 as a result of pressure from religious political parties who do not view finances a legitimate consideration in family planning. In practice, unmarried women can have abortions with relative ease, but not married women, according to Orly Hasson Tsitsuashvili, the Director of Shilo Family Planning Educational and Counseling Center. Abortions are illegal for a married woman whose pregnancy does not fit into one of the four categories—even a married woman suffering from poverty, or already struggling with a large family. A married woman who simply does not want a child, or who wants to practice family planning, certainly does not count.

The primary obstacle for women is the “abortion panel,” a three-person committee consisting of doctors and social workers—including at least one woman—that must approve all abortions. Irit Rosenblum, founding director of the New Family Organization in Tel Aviv, an advocate for reproductive freedom, says “It’s completely chauvinistic...Imagine a man facing prostate surgery being forced to stand in front of a panel asking if he should or shouldn’t do it. If a woman decides to have an abortion, it should be up to her and her doctor to explore the issues and that’s it.” She adds that Israel is the only country in the world to have abortion panels. “It’s a relic from the dark ages.”

Abortions performed without panel approval are punishable by imprisonment for the doctor (and, significantly, not the woman), although in practice this is not enforced, and activists agree that the panels are largely a formality. Still, the fact that the doctor is the one considered culpable reinforces the idea that women cannot or should not decide for themselves regarding their pregnancies. “Until fairly recently, women were considered by the medical establishment to be a kind of inventory, a piece of property that can’t think for herself,” Rosenblum added.

Illegal abortions, those that bypass the abortion panels, are available in Israel, although nobody knows exactly how many there are. Illegal abortions have a very different connotation in Israel than in the United States. “Illegal” abortions are not back-alley, unsanitary procedures with a barely qualified doctor. On the contrary, “illegal” abortion is often better than “legal”: it evades the abortion panel in comfortable, expensive, nobody-has-to-know settings usually run by well-qualified professionals benefiting from high-fee procedures. Illegal simply means there is no panel, avoiding bureaucracy and speeding up the process to a few hours as opposed to up to two weeks. The privilege of privacy and full control over one’s fertility is thus available only

# ISRAEL

to those who can afford to do it without anybody knowing.

Who pays for an abortion provides another window onto Israeli society. In cases of incest or rape, abortions are fully paid for by the state, a provision rooted in Jewish law. Unlike certain unilaterally anti-abortion Christian traditions, Judaism actually sees abortion as the *correct* action in such circumstances. Jewish law is governed by the principle of *rodef*, or “pursuer”; if a fetus is “pursuing” the mother, that is, threatening her life, the pregnancy should be terminated and such an abortion is usually covered by the HMOs. The government also pays for abortions for women who are serving in the army or who are under the age of 20, who do not need to notify their parents—making abortion the only medical procedure in Israel that does not require parental consent for minors. In an interesting exception, however, government payment for abortion is not available for women doing National Service (*Sherut Leumi*), the voluntary alternative to army service usually reserved for religious young women. This exemption means that a religious young woman doing national service will have to pay for her abortion herself, while her secular-soldier counterpart will not, reinforcing the idea that religious unmarried women are assumed to be sexually inactive—and are penalized when they are not.

## THE CONSTRUCTION OF CORRECT FEMININITY

By dictating who can and cannot have an abortion, who should or should not pay, and who should or should not be having babies, the law is in a way regulating women's sexuality. The law is eager to erase “incorrect” motherhood and sexuality—while impeding “correctly” married women from managing their fertility. The norm for sexuality and motherhood is presumed to be a married, heterosexual woman between the ages of 20 and 40. A woman in that category who wants to terminate her pregnancy will likely find some serious obstacles even if in the end her abortion will be approved, as most are. In fact, some married women have confessed that they told the abortion panel they were single, in order to get through the process as smoothly as possible.

“Ruti” a 38-year old accountant, had been married for two years when she became pregnant. She knew all along that she didn't want children. “I just do not see myself as a mother,” she said, six months after her abortion. “Some women get all soft and wistful when they see babies. I don't.” The decision to end the pregnancy was clear to her, but not to her doctor. “He looked

**THERE ARE NO THREATS OF CLINIC BOMBINGS, NO POLITICAL PRESSURE TO OVERTURN WOMEN'S BASIC FREEDOMS, AND NO NEED TO TRAVEL FAR FROM HOME. MOST ABORTIONS ARE LEGAL IN ISRAEL. BUT THEY ARE NOT ALWAYS SIMPLE TO OBTAIN.**

at me like I was crazy, like he had never heard of a woman who doesn't want children. He would not help me, he would not give me information, he did not tell me what to expect or what the procedure entails. He just wanted to get me out of there as quickly as possible, not to have to deal with me.” Ruti went to the hospital with no information about what to expect and no professional support. The panel approved her abortion, but under the category of “mental disease.” “The doctor told me that I needed to get psychological help, because there's no such thing as a sane woman who doesn't want to have a baby,” she recalled painfully. David Ben Gurion, Israel's first Prime Minister, once famously declared that “Any Jewish woman who does not bring into the world at least four healthy children is shirking her duty to the nation, like a soldier who evades military service.”

The abortion panels view a childless woman by choice as a strange anomaly, almost a freak of nature.

## NO PUBLIC DEBATE

In Hebrew, there is no unique word for abortion. “*Hapala*” means both abortion and miscarriage, a confusion which can make it difficult for women to obtain the kind of help they need. “We get so many calls from women with unwanted pregnancies who are unaware of their choices,” says Dana Weinberg, founding director of Women and Their Bodies (<http://www.wtb.org.il/>)

In sharp contrast to the United States, where abortion is a central item on the platform of the major parties, and educational campaigns by organizations like Planned Parenthood are everywhere, in Israel, abortion is simply not part of the public discourse.

Social worker Joanne Zack Pakes, who served as director of the Shilo Family Planning and Education Center in Jerusalem for 16 years, described the irony of the current climate in Israel in which educated modern women do not know the abortion law. She is working on a project with *Isha L'Isha* (Woman to Woman), the Haifa feminist center, training a group of feminist women and researchers to strategize about women's reproductive rights and to run a hotline on these issues. “The women, all professionals in the field, did not have a clue what the abortion

law was in Israel. So if you have knowledgeable educated feminist women who do not know the abortion law, the mainstream population certainly does not know it," she said.

## ENTER EFRAT

The public vacuum is starting to be filled by anti-abortion groups backed by religious ideologies.

An ad recently placed on the front page of *The Jerusalem Post* reads: "Efrat's success: The Health Ministry reports [a] 19% decrease in [the] number of abortions! But 150 unborn babies are still aborted every day. Tens of thousands of children have been already saved by Efrat." This is one of the many media spots of Efrat, formerly known as CRIB, "The Committee for the Rescue of Israeli Babies". The goal of the organization, according to its own statements, is to "rescue" babies from abortion, to make up for the Holocaust and "to increase the Jewish birthrate in Israel."

**"THE DOCTOR TOLD ME THAT I NEEDED TO GET PSYCHOLOGICAL HELP, BECAUSE THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS A SANE WOMAN WHO DOESN'T WANT TO HAVE A BABY."**

## ARIELLA'S STORY: ABORTION IN MY HOMELAND

It was the end of a dry, hot, Israeli summer in 1991 when the two pink lines appeared on my pregnancy test. I never expected that at 21, during that year I spent working and studying in Jerusalem with my new husband, I would become pregnant. All I could do was kneel down in the bathroom in our small apartment and cry.

Chaim began calling abortion advertisers, and unknowingly ended up at two different pro-life organizations (one of them Efrat) run by Americans living in Israel. We clearly needed a new plan. I eventually called a medical center staffed by English speakers where I received the number for Shilo. For the first time since learning of my pregnancy I breathed a sigh of relief.

When we arrived at the Shilo offices the next day, an English-speaking volunteer told us abortion was next to impossible for married women living in Israel, unless the expectant mother could

prove she was insane. Our best and least expensive option was to lie—that is, to have an abortion in an Israeli hospital for about \$300 while hiding the fact that I was married. She also told us that doctors did not perform abortions until the 10th week, and that I needed to have an ultrasound to see exactly how far along I was. The ultrasound clinic, with baby pictures on all the walls, was run by ultra-Orthodox women who asked all sorts of questions about my pregnancy, putting me in a position of having to pretend that I was actually excited to be having a baby. Then I spent five long, nauseous difficult weeks waiting to have my abortion.

When the day arrived, we went to a private hospital in Tel Aviv where we were sent straight to the room called "the pregnancy committee"—an ironic euphemism for the committee that approves abortion. The "committee" consisted of a friendly woman who asked me questions

Women who seek abortions threaten the Jewish people, much the way the Nazis did, according to this narrative. The Efrat materials proclaim, "Since 1977 Efrat saved the lives of over 25,000 Jewish children in Israel." The suggestion is that women's independent decision-making will impede Jewish growth and hold back the vital expansion of the Jewish people.

In the world-view of Efrat, an organization run by a religious man, Dr. Eli Schussheim, and supported by an eclectic group of Israeli rabbis, international donors, and some American Republican members of Congress, women's bodies serve the Jewish collective. To the broad Israeli public, Efrat tries to come across as a type of family planning organization, seeking to "assist" women who are considering abortion. Indeed, according to Ruth Tidhar, assistant director of Efrat they are simply providing "information." This "information" includes one million pamphlets distributed each year that describe the early development of the fetus. "Our job here really is to give the women a true choice," Tidhar says. "Women don't know about the development of the embryo, they don't know how they are going to feel. You want to have an abortion—fine. But just know that 90% of the women who have abortions are really sorry about it afterwards. We are the real pro-choice." So she claims.

Hedva Eyal, coordinator of the Isha LIsha reproductive rights project, recalled a recent incident with a pregnant woman who approached her organization for assistance after being traumatized by an overeager Efrat

having nothing to do with my abortion and then sent us to pay. Then, a man began listing the risks involved—that I could never become pregnant again, that they might not get the embryo out on the first try and would have to repeat the procedure, that they could tear some part of me and that I would have to have surgery, and more. By the time he finished I was a nervous wreck. I kept reminding myself that *Our Bodies Ourselves* said abortions were safer than childbirth.

Next, we went to the room to have the abortion, where I had to say good-bye to Chaim. I was assigned a bed in a room full of beds, some with sleeping women in them and some empty. I was given a robe and told to wait. I watched women being rolled in on stretchers. I thought I would be sick, since I was fasting before the procedure and also had morning sickness. Finally, when it was my turn, I walked half naked in my white robe into a tiny room

volunteer recounting horrific stories about what would happen if the woman had an abortion. “They eventually stopped hounding her, but meanwhile we have a traumatized woman on our hands,” Eyal said.

Tidhar also claims that her group is “feminist,” a statement not only startling for its absurdity but also raising the questions why they want to be considered feminist any more than they would want to be pegged as pro-choice. Efrat is an anti-abortion, anti-women’s-empowerment movement that wants to appear pro-choice and pro-women. Indeed, Efrat’s frequent Hebrew-language radio spots often use benign language like, “Are you pregnant? Contact us, we can help.” We cannot help but wonder if the two-faced nature of the organization reflects a desire to deflect feminist criticism—or perhaps to appeal to certain donors.

Efrat’s marketing campaign works. Guidestar Israel reports that Efrat is working with a \$4 million budget, all from “private donations,” including approximately \$300,000 budgeted for advertising. Meanwhile, Shilo, Israel’s real pro-choice organization, operates with an annual budget of \$150,000, none of which is allocated for advertising. Moreover, while Efrat claims to have helped 3,000 to 4,000 women a year with over 2,000 volunteers on the street, Shilo’s numbers are going down. This disparity is also gendered: the Efrat board and senior staff are predominantly male, while the Shilo staff and board are predominantly female. Thus far, Efrat is winning the battle for the public arena and the pregnant womb—without much of a fight.

## BETWEEN FEMINISTS AND RABBIS: ABORTION POLITICS

Meretz Knesset member Zehava Galon stands lonely on the legal battlefield for women’s reproductive rights. In 2006, she proposed a private bill to revoke the 1977 abortion law and thereby do away with the panels and preconditions.

Galon argued that the legislative process over women’s reproductive rights is not connected to any particular public struggle, but is rather about behind-the-scenes political wrangling far from the public eye. Her bill aimed to “create a new discourse around pregnancy and abortion that is not about motherhood but rather about equality and women’s rights to control their bodies and their fertility,” she said, “one in which the woman is at the center. I wanted to advance a change in the societal ethos via legislative action.”

Galon’s bill failed to pass. Surprisingly, even some feminist lawmakers voted against the law, perhaps afraid that by undoing the abortion bill, abortions will become harder for women rather than easier. “Nobody wants to wake a sleeping bear,” said Zack Pakes. “The religious parties have such power that if we bring it to the foreground, there is a fear that the law will get more restrictive. So therefore everything is hush-hush around abortion.”

Feminist legislators may be justified in their fears of the religious parties. Chief Rabbis Shlomo Amar and Yona Metzger wrote in opposition to Galon’s proposal that the “killing of fetuses in their mothers’ wombs” is akin to “murdering souls” and “delays the Redemption,” introducing language that had until this point been absent from the legislative process in Israel, and which is arguably an imposition of Christian politics onto Israel and Jewish law. Two

where three men closed the door behind me. They told me to put my legs up on the stirrups and they strapped them up. There I was, naked and tied up. All I wanted was a woman in the room with me. Before they gave me anesthesia, one of the younger men said, “What, are you an American?” He asked as if I was a young sleazy-easy American who came to Israel and slept with Is-

to eat! My spirits lifted; I just felt relieved that it was over.

Initially after my abortion, I wanted to excuse the doctor. *Surely he must not have looked at me that way. He did not really mean to ask those questions. He must have meant something else. I must have misunderstood him.* Now I let myself say yes, I was tied up with my naked legs in the air and

in knowing whether I was Jewish—and American? Was he insinuating that Jewish women—American Jewish women—were easy? Slutty? Good in bed? Irresponsible?

And what did it mean that only a married woman who proved herself insane could have an abortion in Israel? Which Jewish women, after all, were considered insane? Only a Jewish woman *crazy enough*

## OUR BEST AND LEAST EXPENSIVE OPTION WAS TO LIE — THAT IS, TO HAVE AN ABORTION IN AN ISRAELI HOSPITAL FOR ABOUT \$300 WHILE HIDING THE FACT THAT I WAS MARRIED

raeli men. Then, he asked me if I was Jewish. Finally, I was given the shots and the next thing I knew, I was being rolled onto my bed and was asking, “Is it over?” and it was.

Immediately I felt terrible cramps, but by the end of the day I was fine, with almost no cramps. Finally for the first time in weeks, I was not nauseated, and I wanted

yes, I was silenced at my core, where I could not speak back. Yes, those were dirty comments, and yes, hurtful.

Recognizing that this doctor’s comments to me were not only misogynist but also anti-Semitic has been even more difficult. Did he assume that I was a Jew, but needed to be sure? What was the purpose

not to want a baby? Who, anyway, got to decide Jewish women’s sanity?

I was thankful that I did not have to prove that I was insane in order to have my abortion, when I actually was quite sane and quite sound in deciding not to become a mother at the age of 21, before I was ready.  
L.A.Z.

years later, in 2008, Shas MK Nissim Zeev proposed an opposing bill to make late-term abortions illegal. “What is happening in Israel is murder, every day,” he told the press. His party leader, Eli Yishai, supported him, as did Rav Eliyahu—the “Rishon L’Zion,” who wrote that “millions [sic] of children have been cut alive since the beginning of the State,” and compared it to what the ancient Egyptians did to Jewish babies. Eliyahu also called the midwives and the doctors “murderers.”

In all of Israel’s history there have been only a handful of public demonstrations on the issue, according to feminist activist Hannah Safran, author of *Don’t Wanna Be Nice Girls: The Struggle for Suffrage and the New Feminism in Israel*. In the absence of real public debate, the status quo remains, and it seems that those with the most money have the most power on the street.

## ISRAEL’S MOST VULNERABLE WOMEN

Meanwhile, religious Jewish women, often among the poorest citizens, are particularly vulnerable. They are pressured to have large

families from a young age. An estimated one in four ultra-Orthodox children lives below the poverty line in Israel. Yet religious leaders are emphatic that economics should not figure into the discussion about abortion. It’s no wonder Efrat’s package of economic support for women who decide not to abort is so attractive.

Still, some religious women are quietly having abortions. Dr. Jordana Hyman, an obstetrician and gynecologist, who specializes in reproductive endocrinology and infertility said “Haredi [ultra-Orthodox] women are also having abortions. Usually they involve a rabbi in making the decision. I have seen women terminate an unintentional pregnancy in a case of severe postpartum depression.”

Statistics about religious women having abortions are difficult to obtain. Tsitsuasuhvili told us that one out of six women who come to Shilo are religious. She says that they come after deciding to end the pregnancy and they know they’ll get support at Shilo—as opposed to from their rabbis or from Efrat. “Most are young and married but not ready to have a child yet,” she said. “It’s family planning.” She also says that most

have not used birth control pills properly, reinforcing the idea that family planning is not properly taught in Israel, especially not in the religious communities. She also claims that the prevalence of information on the Internet, as well as the ease of accessing over-the-counter RU486, the so-called morning-after pill—which has been legal in Israel since 1999—have made it easier for women to get abortions while retaining privacy. But it is not clear that religious women are getting good information from the Internet. A search of religious Jewish women’s counseling centers online comes up with zero information about elective termination of pregnancy. The Nishmat online database of halakhic questions about women’s gynecological issues does not cover elective abortion.

There are other groups of women who are also vulnerable. A 2007 study showed that Ethiopian immigrant women’s abortions rates tripled from 10.5% in 1994 to 29.2% in 2001. By contrast, Russian women’s abortion rates have been decreasing in Israel with access to better contraception. Shilo says that of the number of women who walk into their clinic, 15% are Ethiopian while only 5% are Russian.

Palestinian women are also vulnerable. Without access to safe and legal abortions, they often resort to unsafe techniques to abort an unwanted pregnancy.

One 2006 study with 146 Palestinian women at Bethlehem University concluded that approximately 10% of Palestinian women self-induced abortions. A quarter of the women also talked about abortion being

## ATTITUDES MUCH THE SAME AS 20 YEARS AGO

To test out the experience of obtaining an abortion in Israel today, we approached two clinics—one that performs “legal” abortions and one that performs “illegal” abortions. One of us described herself as a 38-year-old mother with four children who was eight weeks pregnant and wanted an abortion. At both clinics the employees—including the doctors—tried to convince us not to have the abortion. In the case of the legal abortion, an employee by the name of Sigal first asked, “Why did you wait so long?” then asked us not to wait too long because “We are people too.” In other words, the abortion practitioner herself expressed discomfort with abortions undertaken beyond the very first weeks of pregnancy. Her anti-abortion pitch then went up a tone when she asked, laughing, “Why are you worried about having a fifth child? So have a fifth child. What’s the big deal?” However, she eventually said, “If you decide that this is what you want to do, come in and I will help you.”

When we presented at the “illegal” abortion clinic, the doctor initially responded, “How sure are you that you don’t want the pregnancy? You know, you’re 38 years old and you have to think about it, because at the age of 38, having an abortion means you really don’t want another baby and this is probably your last pregnancy. If you want another baby, then I suggest you don’t terminate now. But whatever you want.” He added that he would evade the abortion panel—making this abortion illegal—because, “If you go to the panel, I’m not sure they will give you the permission.” Despite his own reservations, he quickly added, “I think it’s the woman’s choice and the woman’s right to decide if she wants it or not.” In both of these exchanges with abortion clinics, the professionals expressed a reluctant willingness to perform the abortion while at the same time unabashedly voicing their own strong opinions that it was the wrong decision. A married mother in her 30s is not supposed to have an abortion. This attitude reflects abortion in Israel generally: legal but discouraged; rightfully protected but frowned upon; acceptable in an emergency, but not a tool for family planning.

E.M.S. AND L.A.Z.

necessary for unmarried women to prevent “honor killings” where a woman is murdered by her male relative because of her perceived sexual misconduct.

### A CULTURAL FREE-FOR-ALL

Many people believe that Israel is a generation behind America when it comes to social issues concerning race, class and gender. Certainly when it comes to the separation of religion and state, Israel is far behind, as religious parties currently run the health ministry and several other key ministries according to their own agendas. While some may argue that the absence of a public struggle works in women’s favor—after all, abortions are basically legal and only a few radical religious leaders are putting up a fight—the public vacuum leaves frightening space for a cultural free-for-all. Right now, the organization Efrat is win-

### **IN SHARP CONTRAST TO THE UNITED STATES, ABORTION IS SIMPLY NOT PART OF THE PUBLIC DISCOURSE. THE PUBLIC VACUUM IS STARTING TO BE FILLED BY ANTI-ABORTION GROUPS.**

ning the battle for public education, with an ideology that bull-dozes women’s actual economic, emotional, and family-planning needs, and smacks of manipulation of women’s bodies and lives. And their budgets mean that they are not going away any time soon. Right now, Efrat has the last word because nobody powerful enough is challenging them.

The absence of public discourse also maintains the tradition of delegitimizing women’s overt, active control over their bodies and lives—physically, emotionally and economically. Discussion of women’s management of their own fertility is completely absent from the public arena, and thus many women lack the platform and the language to legitimize their own family planning and choices. Given the current religious-political climate in Israel, and the multiple battles that women are waging for equality in the public sphere and in economic and political life, it is possible that taking this battle public would indeed ignite a fire, one for which even many Israeli feminists seem unprepared. ■

*L. Ariella Zeller holds a doctorate in American Culture from the University of Michigan, and her writing has focused on Jewish women and sexuality and fertility in early 20th century America.*

*Elana Maryles Sztokman holds a doctorate in gender and education from Hebrew University, writes and consults widely on issues of gender in the Jewish community, and is the author of the just-published The Men's Section: Orthodox Jewish Men in an Egalitarian World.*

## POETRY

### FATHER AND SONS

*For David, Daniel, and Jonah Akiba*

There is a space between them,  
in that space they hold cameras.  
The father with his old-fashioned lens,  
the son with a modern video camera.  
The third man, the other son,  
is the one who is the subject  
of both their viewfinders.  
That is the way it has always been.  
There are those who plunge in,  
searching and yearning,  
like salmon swimming upstream  
till they find their home to spawn.  
The others watch, tell the story,  
wait for the story to include them.  
Loss is inevitable.  
It happens whether they expect it or not.  
When it comes  
they are filming, photographing,  
writing, crying, and laughing.  
“Chazak chazak veneetchazek,”  
my mother took to telling me  
shortly after my grandfather  
left this world.  
“Be strong, be strong, and let us strengthen one another.”  
This person who dances and davens and laughs before you,  
who loves somebody or some life  
you cannot understand or approve.  
He is still the person  
you held in your arms  
with whom you waited  
until the school bus picked him up.  
He is still yours.

EVE LYONS

# STRONGHOLD

A SHORT STORY BY NAAMA GOLDSTEIN

Nine candle holders made of soda-bottle caps glued on a piece of plywood. Paint and glitter and industrial scraps, bolts, nuts, pebbles, a whole mess of extra trimmings if you wanted. I did not. I only swamped the thing with glue, hoping it wouldn't dry. When school let out the substitute sneaked up on me just past the gate, panting. "Oy *va'avoy!* Look what we almost forgot!" The glue had set, unfortunately. She made me take my Menorah.

I pressed it to my uniform skirt through the streets, a kindergarten project in the hands of a sixth-grader. Shameful, any idiot could see that, with a few exceptions. Such as Oreet. She held hers like a prize. She has about as much of a clue as the substitute, not that I'd say it to her face. Grades aren't everything.

I smelled fried yeast dough and vanilla, Hanukkah. We found the source, a soldier waiting for a bus, setting off puffs of powdered sugar with each bite of sufgania. He smiled at Oreet with snow-white lips.

"You built that?"

"Me," she said.

"No!"

"Yes."

"You have an artist's touch," he said.

"It was an interesting assignment," she said. "Take a kindergarten project. Bottle caps, wood, glue. Make a Menorah."

"Sure. I remember that," he said.

"Then bring it up to date. See possibilities you didn't then. Express your vision now."

He asked her age. I had a better question.

"You back from the war?"

He said, "That's privileged."

"Not true. You can't say where, exactly, or what you have seen, that's all. You weren't deployed? So you push papers. Or you're maintenance. Supplies?"

He licked the powder from his lips. He eyed my work. "Yours came out rather shitty. That's all right," he said. "Not all of us can have the same abilities."

I said, "You're proof."

Oreet caught up a few blocks down.

"Is he still after me?" I said.

"He never was. He made as if to. I apologized. I gave him my Menorah."

Her hands were empty.

"Good," I said. "That project was a waste of time and so is he. A perfect match."

"You go too far," she said. "I have respect for him. He is a soldier."

"No. You want to see a soldier, see my brother," I said, even if one thing my soldier brother isn't so much, anymore, is seeable. He's home now. He stays out of sight. Mostly he sleeps. He can't forever. He'll come out eventually. He'll look the same.

"When will your brother be deployed again?" Oreet asked.

"That is privileged."

We reached our grocers. There are two. Once we had one, now there's a choice.

I said, "At last!"

"At last, what? You need something from the shop?"

"Only the trash." I walked up to the dumpster. I commenced to stage a show, a horror show for my upstanding friend. I dangled my Menorah over green bread and flattened cartons, hopeless fruit, the reek of soured milk. "I don't know what I'd even do with this," I said. I let one finger lose its grip, and then the next. She almost died.

She snatched my work from me and kissed it.

"You just have to go too far. You're crazy. It's a Holy Implement. That would have been a sacrilege."

"Keep it," I said, "and enjoy. I have a real one back home."

"So give it to someone in need," she said. "Make a gift to the indigent"

"Aren't you exemplary?"

"I just work hard."

There's no denying that. She's our top student, first to study



for a test, first to complete it, first to volunteer when needed, first to offer her assistance to a failing girl, fairly impossible to shake, so far.

"Just for your information," I said, "that kiss was idolatry, speaking of sacrilege. Don't do it ever again in your life. Don't ever kiss a menorah."

"Where's that idea from?"

"From my good brain," I said. "Calm down. Yes, it's a deadly sin, but you committed it misguidedly. Once is an error. There won't be a twice."

"You can't explain."

"I can. What's this whole holiday about?"

"The triumph of the Maccabees. What are we, four years old?"

"Wrong. Cleaning house. Please pay attention to the name. Rededication of the House. We cleaned it out. We lit the light."

"The House of God, the Light of God, in a Menorah," she said, "which you should not throw in the trash."

I sighed. "Not all of us can always understand, but that's okay." I took my project back. "So what you said. We'll go with that."

**A CRAZY MAN NAMED OVERALLS LIVES IN OUR TOWN.** I've never seen him dressed in overalls but that's the name. It's his name as our crazy man. He's not our only one and not the worst, not the sort who must look for trouble, rage, get in your way. But he's far-gone. He's always in a rush, softly discussing agitating matters only with himself, unless he's chased. I've never chased him, never has he noticed me, but he scares me the most. I see him the most. He's my neighbor. He lives on my street.

Oreet knew just the house, knew the abandoned lot. She knows his name and knows it makes no sense, you'll never see him wearing overalls. He wears the crazy clothes, layers upon layers in colors of mud and mildew and dust. She knows all that. She could believe that I know more. She does not live as close.

I said, "He has things he does this time of day. He won't be there. We'll never see him. He won't see us. We'll leave the Menorah and go." I said, "Every soul in his family was lost in the Camps." I heard that once.

"The highest virtue in giving is to give in secret," she said.

"We should buy him candles," I said. "Matches, too."

"No, *I* should. You're already giving your Menorah."

"You gave yours, too."

"That's not the same. I want a part in this," she said.

We faced the shops, two, very similar-looking, side by side.

"I buy at Peretz," I said.

"Really? Peretz cheats."

"You're kidding."

"It's a well-established fact. I would have thought you knew."

I did. But Alkalay's throat is appointed with a medical device.

"You want me to go in with you?" I said.

"There is no need."

THE BUILDINGS ON MY STREET, ALL OF AN EQUAL HEIGHT, WERE BUILT BY ONE DEVELOPER, EGOZ. The name is written on each building in mosaic letters, nice ceramic fragments recollecting ancient shards from digs. Each multistory is stucco-covered. Each stands upon pillars, shading parking spots, a small square lawn, flowering bushes, and a slide and sandbox for the children growing up inside. It is an ordinary street. One undeveloped lot is not unusual. Egoz didn't build on it.

We passed my garden path and didn't walk onto it. I felt my key under my blouse. I didn't pull it out. I didn't unlock our lobby door, didn't press the button for the elevator, wait, or climb the stairs. We pushed through stalks high as our heads and stepped on dirt. It took no time to cross onto his land.

The world was wild and repetitious in there, like the sea, but golden, the parched gold of wicker, weeds and weeds. Deeper in,

*Each move caused waves in the forsaken lot. One weed swayed thousands. We dodged and tripped, and tripped again.*

chalk, weeds paled to eggshell-white and suddenly malformed, blistered like underwater plants and as alive-seeming. They were alive. Snails had cemented themselves everywhere, from root to thorn.

"Nothing to worry about," I said.

"Right."

"Nothing at all. They're the most harmless thing that you could see in your whole life."

"The snails frighten you?"

"No! Why?"

She worked her lips and jaws. She spit. "Maybe I'll wake one up."

"You spit."

"Sometimes that wakes them up."

"You spit. I never saw you spit," I said.

"Everyone spits."

I turned around. I found the neighborhood still there. Sounds sifted through and I could see, in fractions, the familiar sights. Yaeer Bogana, building Nine, on his supposedly new bike, ready to let go of the handlebars—now!—as a lady on high heels clacked along, the type my mother says invests all of her brainpower in her looks. A lot of power, a complicated look. Even her walk was intricate. I undertook to know its parts. I staged a show

for my fine friend. She almost choked. "You go too far."

And she was right, this once. I overstated matters for effect, I felt invisible. But the reverse was true. Each move caused waves in the forsaken lot. One weed swayed thousands. Dormant snails seemed to come to rowdy life. Shells came in contact with our ankles and our wrists and necks too much. We dodged and tripped, and tripped again. The soil was weirdly rocky, planted with peculiar lumps.

A rusted skillet. At our feet we saw a kettle, too, a stockpot and a dented coffee boiler, pressure-cooker lid, colander, saucepan. We held hands like little girls, suddenly scared of pots and pans. Being man-made they seemed to have man-made ideas, and not good ones, or they wouldn't be here. That couldn't be true. I said uncultured people used this as their dump.

"For only kitchenware?"

We found slim loaf pans of assorted lengths and baking sheets, a Bundt cake mold—but also shreds of an old tire, a chair leg, one compacted shoe.

"Just normal junk," she said. "You're right."

I let her hand go or she mine.

We raised our chins. We marched ahead. We nearly crashed into a wall. The weeds grew right up to the house, and we had been looking down.

The house, gouged, cracked and stained, was sound, made of materials from another time. The smell was foul but restrained. The boarded windows caged it. Just one window was exposed, showing its grimy pane. I placed my project on that sill.

I said, "It feels right at home."

And she said, "You are doing a very, very beautiful thing."

Crusted glue slanted all my bottle caps, each angled differently, the plywood naked, prettied only with my fingerprints.

"It fits right in," I said.

She placed beside my Menorah the matches and the candles she had bought, the cartons spotless, labeled cheerfully.

She said, "Good, done."

I pressed my face against the glass.

"Let's go," she said, but huddled next to me and squinted, saw what I saw and jumped back. A nest, layer on layer, in colors of mildew, mud and dust.

"That's just his bed," I said. I pushed the glass. A brown gum sealed it to the frame. "This doesn't open," I said. "This is not how he gets in. He'll walk right by. He'll miss it. All our work will be a waste."

Our gifts collected, we crept on, circled the house, each window shuttered in a lasting way, door nailed shut.

We had almost come around entirely when we found his entryway. A curtain breathed, hung by two loops. The lace was filthy so the pattern was the sharpest I have seen. We stared in. Our eyes adjusted. We held hands again.

Like the Red Sea split, heaps of pots seemed to be flooding toward us in twin waves. They didn't. They just reared up frozen. Everything was propped against two walls. A narrow corridor was left. It burrowed inward, maybe turned and twisted. That far in the dark we couldn't see. We knew what was there. More.

Pots. Pots and pots, all stacked with terrible attention to each spout and mouth and leg and handle that could fix the project to itself. Overalls' project. I had never seen him carrying a pot.

"Why does he do it?" Oreet said.

"How should I know?"

"They're only pots," she said. "Why should it be so dreadful here?"

"Oh, let me think. Is it the stench?"

She had been breathing through her mouth. She sniffed. The smell in fact was no worse than before. She leaned a little further in.

I grabbed her schoolbag, reined her by its straps. I said, "Use your own brain for once. It is a burglar alarm. Don't even breathe on it, don't touch. The whole thing will collapse. Think of the noise. Then what?"

"That's right. You're right," she said. "You got it right." She stared at me.

I heard the neighborhood, not far.

"But wait a minute," Oreet said. "What sort of an alarm is that? If it is triggered while he's gone, he's got no place to sleep. If he is home, he's trapped."

"What do you want from me?" I said. "It isn't my design."

A cloud veiled and unveiled the light.

She took my Menorah and stood it on the sill. She stepped back to observe, chewed on her lips, seemed to be searching for the least upsetting words, like anyone was there who was upset. "Can we be sure," she said, "that he'll identify this as you meant?"

"Would anyone?" I said.

"I wasn't putting down your work."

"As if I care."

"I wasn't. I was picturing it from his point of view."

She struck a match. She warmed the bases of ridged candles. She positioned them, held them upright. The wax set. She stepped back, observed, returning to rotate the candle box. The back faced forward now. The panel seen was the one printed with the blessings in their order, for such people who might not remember or know.

"Good, done."

We left as we had entered, walking normally, just two girls in their usual way, simply more conscious of the ground under their feet.

Or so we meant to bring it to a close, that's how we wanted it to go.

I left quite rashly and she after me, having no choice. The area of the whitened weeds seemed deeper than before. Maybe it wasn't, as she said. Yet there they were and there they were, and I had had enough. We crashed through bone-white, fragile beadwork. Only snails, but they broke the heart, pitiable under our shoes, more sickening in their wholeness, in their bulbous repetition, in their fragile multitudes, each glued to all the others by the same secret command.

Under my building we leaned on my family car.

"We did good," she said. "That's what you should think about."

**AT HOME TOWARD SUNSET WE PREPARED FOR THE FIRST LIGHT OF HANUKKAH,** my sister and my mother in the kitchen, grating, frying, as my father pulled together our ritual supplies.

He coated the inner windowsill with foil against the drips. Next he collected each Menorah.

His and my brother's were of silver. He removed them from

the glass-front case. The girls' were made of matter that when left exposed was not much changed. Mine waited all year upon a door frame and my sister's with the potted plants. He brushed the dust off a brass lion, flicked a fly's wing off a copper olive branch.

He warmed the bases of ridged candles. He positioned them, held them upright. The wax set. He got matches ready and a

*Only snails, but they broke the heart, in their fragile multitudes, each glued to all the others by the same secret command.*

prayer book. We all assembled. Not my brother. Last year he was absent, too. We lit without him. He was a soldier, there was war. There's still a war, he's still a soldier. He is home now. He stays out of sight. Mostly he sleeps. He can't forever. Maybe he would come out tonight.

I knocked.

He said, "Go forth and tell thy father that his hymns are loathsome unto me."

I went. I said he had a belly ache.

"Oy, and with all these heavy foods," my mother said, as if he would have joined us at the table otherwise.

We lit, my father first, my sister when my brother should have gone, me last, our mother watching as the flames caught wick by wick. We sang the hymns, my father leading, starting with "These Candles," and then all through "Maoz Tzoor," the longest, each verse finding the same lesson in a chapter of our olden times. We won't be extinguished. God is on our side.

I understand my brother is tired. I know he wants to sleep a lot. When he's awake his manner is odd. It's out of place. He goes too far.

I saved his meal, arranged a sample of each food, covered his plate, left out a fork and knife and spoon, a folded napkin, a filled cup. My sister rolled her eyes. Our parents praised me for my kind, constructive outlook. But I meant it as a dig. I am the one who knows he does not have a belly ache.

That night and every night of the eight nights I checked the view outside. I looked down on the undeveloped lot to find our influence.

It's possible that our apartment has the wrong perspective, too much height above such small and short-lived flames. It's also possible that Overalls didn't use my Menorah. He never lit Oreet's thin candles, didn't sing a blessed word. Forget about her thoughtful setup. It was lost on him. He will not see parts as we mean them. He collects our household implements and gives them a new use, sees powers in them that we didn't, and who wants to, right? Who cares. I will go only so far as to say I knew his place would be a mess. I knew that it would stink. As for his burglar alarm, there are simpler and better. ■

*Naama Goldstein is an Israeli-American writer and translator living in Boston. Her collection of stories, The Place Will Comfort You, was published by Scribner.*

# THE RADICAL CAMERA

## *When Women Photographers Took to the Streets*

by REBECCA SHAYKIN

The Photo League (1936–1951) was a New York camera club unlike any other. Many of its core members were 20-something Jewish Americans whose progressive politics and passion for photography compelled them to take pictures that would promote social change.

A remarkable one-third of the League's members were women. The strong female presence at the League can be attributed in part to the democratic medium of photography itself. To be a painter or sculptor, women needed access to art schools they often could not afford or were discouraged from attending. But photography was not yet considered a fine art; all one needed was a camera and a good eye to become a professional. Furthermore, the League was inexpensive and open to all. In the 1930s, respected female photojournalists, including Margaret Bourke-White and Dorothea Lange, were already working in the field. By the 1950s, pictures by women were cropping up in magazines, newspapers, and galleries across America.

Because of its liberal roots, the Photo League was later accused of being a Communist-front organization and was blacklisted in 1947. The League disbanded four years later. Some of its women gave up photography, while others went on to be successful artists and photojournalists. Regardless, the majority of women Leaguers have been overshadowed by their male colleagues or simply forgotten over time. Several recent exhibitions, however, have brought their photographs back into the light. "The Radical Camera: New York's Photo League, 1936–1951," currently on view at The Jewish Museum, New York, includes the work of 22 of the League's women. Here, meet six of them.

*The Radical Camera is on view at The Jewish Museum until March 25, 2012. The show will then travel to the Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio; The Contemporary Jewish Museum, San Francisco; and the Norton Museum of Art, West Palm Beach, Florida.*

**Berenice Abbott (1898–1991)**

**ZITO'S BAKERY, 259 BLEECKER STREET, 1937.**

While working as Man Ray's studio assistant in Montparnasse in the 1920s, Berenice Abbott discovered the work of Eugène Atget, a French photographer who captured the streets of Paris. Abbott returned to the States determined to document New York, a city for which she felt a "fantastic passion." With the support of the New Deal's Federal Art Project, she created hundreds of images of the city in the late 1930s, from sweeping panoramas of newly built skyscrapers to intimate pictures of one-of-a-kind storefronts. In a 1938 *Life* magazine article about the series she called "Changing New York," Abbott explained that buildings "say more about a people than their noses." Her commitment to documentary photography led her to the League, where she joined the advisory board in 1938, helping to shape the organization in its formative years.



THE JEWISH MUSEUM, PURCHASE: MAN AND BAKERY, L. ALFERN FUND.



**Vivian Cherry (born 1920)**

**GAME OF LYNCHING, EAST HARLEM, 1947.**

Despite the increasingly conservative climate in the United States, many Photo Leaguers refused to shy away from making politically charged pictures. Rosalie Gwathmey, Marion Palfi, Sonia Handelman Meyer and Vivian Cherry all created powerful images that spoke to the burgeoning civil rights movement. Cherry began her series "Game of Guns," an investigation of violence in children's games, shortly after the Moore's Ford massacre in Georgia. Her pictures of children playing at lynching are a chilling reminder of the impact of current events on young minds. Cherry reports that the kids took turns "lynching" each other; that is, they understood the violent nature of the act, but were too young to comprehend the racist motivation behind the murders. Photography magazine published the series and praised Cherry's ability to use the camera as a "tool for social research."

*Rebecca Shaykin is a curatorial assistant at The Jewish Museum. She first discovered the work of women Photo Leaguers at Belvoir Terrace, a summer camp for girls, thanks to her inspirational photography teacher Shira Weinert.*



**ABOVE: Rebecca Lepkoff (born 1916)**  
LOWER EAST SIDE, 1947.

Rebecca Lepkoff grew up on the Lower East Side, a daughter of Russian Jewish immigrants. She joined the Photo League after WWII and began to document her old neighborhood, then in the process of reinventing itself: old tenements were being torn down and replaced, Jewish families were relocating to the suburbs and new immigrant communities were moving in. Here she shows a young boy walking down a snowy street, sledding tire in hand, past an empty lot. On the fence behind him is a billboard advertising the controversial film "Gentleman's Agreement," which exposed the unacknowledged anti-Semitism pervading postwar American culture. Two of the film's stars, both Jewish, were soon blacklisted. Lepkoff's image shows how anti-Semitism and political discord loomed large in the lives of ordinary people during the McCarthy era.



**Ida Wyman (born 1926)**  
SIDEWALK CLOCK, NEW YORK, 1947.

Ida Wyman secured her first photography job fresh out of high school in 1943. With so many men serving overseas, employers began hiring women, and she became the first female printer at Acme Newspictures. But when the war ended, she was promptly let go. Undeterred, Wyman joined the League and became a freelance photographer for *Life*, *Fortune*, and *The Saturday Evening Post*. Her attention to detail is evident in pictures such as *Sidewalk Clock*. The modest timepiece was embedded in the pavement of Broadway and Maiden Lane in 1899, and it remains a hidden gem of New York's cityscape. Although it has been there for over a century, the clock continues to go unnoticed as thousands of people walk on it each day. Wyman's picture brings the neglected clock to the fore, and, with a pair of stockings legs confidently striding across the frame, makes a bold statement about the progress of women in modern times.



### Lisette Model (1906–1983)

LOWER EAST SIDE, C. 1940.

Born in Vienna, Lisette Model took some of her first pictures in the South of France, where she cast a sardonic eye on the wealthy patrons of seaside resorts. In 1938 she moved to New York and soon joined the League, where she had her first solo exhibition. Ever an outsider, she was drawn to figures on the margin of society, photographing eccentric nightclub acts on assignment for magazines such as *Harper's Bazaar*. This photo, a humanizing portrait of an apparently homeless man, exemplifies the type of socially conscious photography she promoted. "The thing that shocks me and which I really try to change," said Model, "is the lukewarmness, the indifference, the kind of taking pictures that really doesn't matter." Countless students would absorb her lesson, first at the League, and later at the New School where Diane Arbus and Joan Roth were among her illustrious pupils.



### Ruth Orkin (1921–1985)

TIMES SQUARE, FROM ASTOR HOTEL, 1950.

Though general membership declined rapidly after the League's blacklisting, some photographers joined in solidarity. Ruth Orkin brought a playful quality to her pictures of street life. This bird's-eye view presents three sailors seen from above, surrounded by pedestrians. The trio of white caps, two fedoras, and mother-and-child pair punctuate the gridded sidewalk like notes on a sheet of music. The composition is jazzy and abstract. Orkin's picture signals a shift towards a more creative mode of picture-taking that future generations of street photographers would come to embrace after the League closed its doors in 1951.

# Let's Take Five

## PASSOVER, KALEIDOSCOPICALLY

Passover is full of fours: four questions, four sons [sic], four cups of Manischewitz. In these pages, we go one better because feminists have added much to the mix, and many of the additions were conceived right here at Lilith: honoring four daughters, creating Miriam's Cup, acknowledging the perils of running a seder for the first time, eating disorders at a time of feasting, and more. (Visit Lilith.org for our rich archive of Passover stories.)

Lilith commissioned the first material *Kos Miriam* [Miriam's Cup] from the artist Nissan Graham-Mayk in 1992. Opening the door for Elijah is ages old, but opening the door to women's experience of Passover—its narratives, its observance, its blessings—feels thrillingly confirmed when we see the original Miriam's Cup now in the collection of the Jewish Museum in New York. This ritual heralded the stampeding, door-breaking arrival of Jewish women into the seder liturgy—after only 3200 years.

We bring you a new set of Passover stories now, so that you, Lilith's careful readers, will have time in advance of the holiday not only to metabolize these writers' insights, but to transform them into something that's your own. "*Kol ha-marbeh lesaper, ha-ray zeh meh'shubach*," the Hagaddah enjoins. "All who amplify the Passover story are deserving of praise." A fifth cup to that.

What follows are largely meditations on Time, a specialty of Passover: the past, the future, and the eternal present. Plus: a teaching about Elijah's hypermasculinity and a new ritual that links adopted children's journeys to that of Moses (who famously had two mothers).

Jewish women are so grateful to have Passover as a holiday. Enjoy.

—Rabbi Susan Schnur



# The Joy of Chametz

by HADAR DUBOWSKY MA'AYAN

I'm cleaning for Pesach and here's what I've found in the bottom of my freezer so far: five small ice packs in various shapes used for "owies," a half-eaten popsicle, a fish stick that escaped its box, pureed pumpkin from the fall harvest, and two glow-in-the-dark light sticks. I'm almost surprised that I didn't find one last baggie of pumped breast milk, carefully measured and dated.

I'm cleaning my kitchen for Pesach. We do it every year. Well, almost every year. There was one year that we had to pay someone to help us do it. It was painful; I felt like it contradicted all of my values. Cleaning for Pesach isn't just cleaning for me. It's about beginning the process of preparing for a holiday that's about spring and liberation. Cleaning feels like working hard to start anew, and it mirrors the "spiritual cleaning" of reaching towards a more just way of living. And yet, here I was, paying a monolingual Spanish-speaking woman and her daughter to clean my kitchen for us. My twins were newborns; there was no way we could do it. We couldn't even manage to do dishes every day, let alone clean for Pesach. Determined, though, I kept putting the babies down to pick up a sponge, trying to work alongside Irma and Ana, her daughter. After a few moments a baby would scream and I'd return to nursing and changing a diaper and nursing again.

"My mom says to tell you that we're okay and you should sit," Ana kindly translated.

"Gracias," I said exhaustedly.

Now it is four years later and I'm back to cleaning, cleaning the kitchen that is. The bathrooms are another story. With three young children—one of them a little boy with a tendency to spray—our bathroom is just disgusting. But that's another story and I'm not so worried

about that today. Today I am focusing on the freezer and the remaining articles lingering in its dark crevices.

TO BE HONEST, we have two freezers. We bought the deep freezer when we were planning for our second child. It was some sort of pre-pregnancy nesting instinct. There is something about a deep freezer that symbolizes having enough food to feed a growing family. I pictured harvesting our garden and preparing the food for a deep winter freeze, having space for big boxes of popsicles, and extra meat tucked away. When I was growing up my grandmother had a second refrigerator in her cellar where she kept "extra food," including strawberry and chocolate ice cream parfaits. I can still feel the sensation of a hot summer day, wet in our bathing suits, the cool cement cellar floor beneath our feet, opening the fridge door to a blast of cold air, as we each took a sugary parfait treat. To me, the extra freezer means delicious abundance wrapped with a sweet feeling of security.



*"C'mon," I plead with my kids. "Eat some more chametz. I can't stand it going to waste."*

I love my deep freezer. It lives up to all of my expectations. I can go to Trader Joe's and buy all the sale items I want. I can purchase huge tubs of ice cream and pull them out on summer days, spooning out bowls for pennies. I harvest our vegetables and make huge vats of tomato sauce, peaches in sugar-water, pureed pumpkins and squash that last nearly the entire winter. I make challah with the kids, eight loaves at a time, and every Thursday I draw one out of the deep freezer, ready to go without having to run to the store. It makes me feel like a combination of Earth Mother, Garden Mama, Rachael Ray and my grandmother—what could be better than that?

THROUGHOUT MY LIFE, I've had a range of Pesach cleaning experiences, depending on my relationship to Judaism at the time. I grew up in a family where my mom cleaned out all the *chametz* for Pesach and put it in paper bags in the garage. We were serious about Passover. One year when I was eight, I forgot about Pesach and ate a sandwich at a birthday party and felt horribly guilty. We brought jam on matzah to school, but the apple in the bag always hit it, and the nice square my mom made the night before became lots of little pieces.

As an adult, I had some years when I brought the fervor of strict observance to my Pesach cleaning, and some years where I'd actually drive my *chametz* to a soup kitchen. I don't like the whole "give-a-goy-a-dollar-and-pretend-the-*chametz*-isn't-mine" game. Now I pretty much lean towards the "eat-all-the-*chametz*-you-can" tradition. In fact, just earlier today I was passing out empty ice cream cones, found in the back of the pantry, to my kids.

"C'mon, eat some more *chametz*," I plead. "I can't stand it going to waste."

"Mom, can we have some ice cream with it?" asks my nine-year-old.

"No, just eat the cone," I say. "I don't need to get rid of the ice cream, just the cones!"

"Pretend ice cream!" squeals one of my four-year-olds and sets about with his sister to play a make-believe ice cream truck game.

AT OUR SYNAGOGUE there's a group called the *Mishpocha* Committee. Its job is to help members in need. When we first had the twins, the *Mishpocha* Committee put us on their list. A handful of women in their fifties and sixties with kind and gentle spirits, most of them with grown children of their own, would come to our home and help hold a baby or two while I showered or did a load of dishes. It was hard for me to hold my own neediness. I was embarrassed by not having it

all under control, but the reality was that I was completely overwhelmed. I was touched by their generosity and humility.

"It's okay," they would reassure me. "We've had babies of our own."

"Sometimes I miss babies," one woman told me. "It's been a long time."

Through her white hair and aging face, I could picture her with her own baby as she stood there rocking my infant, swaying her hips side to side.

"This doesn't last forever," she said. "You'll get through this."

THIS YEAR, AS I clean my freezer, I have a flash of this white-haired mother's wisdom. We won't always need a deep freezer. Someday, it will be just two of us, or even just be me eating by myself. Someday we won't need huge tubs of ice cream or the extra large trays of chicken drumsticks. Someday we won't buy

popsicles or ice packs for "owies," or have light sticks in a freezer. Someday it will all look different.

As I clean my deep freezer I am overwhelmed by appreciation for my family, for our food, for all we have right now at this moment. As I scrub the popsicle drippings off the freezer walls and use a sponge to pick random fish stick crumbs off the bottom, I am grateful for the abundance of my life.

"Thank you, God, for all the blessings of a deep freezer," I pray silently. "On this Pesach, 5771, thank you." ■

*Hadar Dubowsky Ma'ayan is a writer, middle school teacher, educational researcher, professor and mother living in Albuquerque. She is the author of Reading Girls: Lives and Literacies of Adolescents [Teacher's College Press, 2012].*

## Redemption, 1955

by ELLEN SCHECTER

A fter a long drive, my parents and I arrive at Tenth and South Streets in downtown Philadelphia. We're right on time so we won't upset Poppop. My stomach's already tight as a fist. I check my mother: no lipstick, of course, and no one's wearing red. We don't want Nana to get whipped with Poppop's belt for our mistakes.

I fidget on the white marble steps that Nana scrubs weekly on her hands and knees and watch Negroes walk past. My father has told me that this is a "changing neighborhood," meaning that a few very old Jews are holding onto their shops and houses as more and more Negroes move in.

At the door, Nana crushes me against her soft bosom. "Hurry up, don't keep Poppop waiting," she whispers, and we immediately go in and sit down at the table.

Poppop starts complaining. "Sarah, what kinda matzah you got? Lookit all these crumbs."

"Ben, matzah always gets crumbs," she answers.

"There's no wine in Elijah's cup. You can't do nothing right?"

"Oy, vey iz mir." Nana jumps up to get the wine.

Poppop scowls at us, then reads the Haggadah at 400 miles an hour. He points to the seder plate. "Zeroa, roasted bone. Karpas, parsley. Sarah! Where's the karpas?" he thunders. "There can't be no seder without karpas."

Nana puts both hands to her cheeks, which turn scarlet, then white. "Oh, my God, it's right in the kitchen, I forgot to put it on the plate, Ben." Poppop glowers at her, his blue eyes hard as marbles. Then he scolds her in a stream of Yiddish.



*"Forget the  
goddamn prophet  
Elijah! He  
don't live at  
Tenth and South  
no-how!"*

He continues reading and we sit in silence, as though the strange Hebrew words have cast a spell.

Finally it's time to open the door for Elijah. Thrilled, I run towards the front door, but Poppop catches my arm.

"Where d'ya think you're going?" he spits at me through his naked gums.



I'm stung and shaking, deathly afraid to cross him.

"Open the front door? Whaddaya, *meshugenah*? Siddown! You want some *shvartse* to come in, rob all the silver, and kill us in our chairs?"

I don't know exactly what *shvartse* means, but I think it's a nasty word for Negro, and my father told me never to use it.

"But, Poppop," I protest, my throat aching with tears, "how can the Prophet Elijah come to our table if—"

"Forget the goddamn Prophet Elijah! He don't live at Tenth and South in downtown Philly no-how. What does he know?"

Tears climb over the ache and spill out of my eyes and nose.

"Aw, Ben," my father says. "The kid just learned about Elijah from a book Pearl read to her."

"You're the one who insists she get a Jewish education," my mother says tearfully to her father. "And now, when I teach her something—"

"Ah, shaddup!" Poppop slams the flat of his hand on the table so hard that Nana's gold-rimmed dishes jump. A delicate wine glass teeters for a long moment, then falls, spilling wine as red as Egyptian blood across the white damask tablecloth.

I'm so frightened my tears dry up.

"Ben," my father says. He pauses, then speaks calmly. "Ben, why don't you pour some schnapps for us? I'll open the alley door for Elijah. The gate's locked, the dog's there, nobody can get in. Ellen, get a dish cloth from the kitchen."

When I return, my father suggests I inspect the silver cup. Before, the wine touched the top of the engraved star; now, it barely reaches the bottom.

"He came," I say in wonderment. "Elijah came here, to Tenth and South." ■

*Ellen Schecter survived the only seder of her childhood and went on to write The Family Haggadah for her children, later published by Viking. She has written many books for children, and her memoir, Fierce Joy, is due out in March.*

## ELIJAH'S ABS

The biblical Elijah is said to visit Jews on two occasions—circumcisions and seders—and he does so because he is tasked with "reconciling the hearts of fathers to sons and sons to fathers" (a job so difficult, according to the prophet Malachi, that it will be the penultimate "miracle" before the coming of the Messiah). The rabbis understood that competitive male tensions, even trauma, undergird the acts of generational transmission at the heart of both the bris and the seder. At the bris, there's the foreskin thing, of course; at the seder, there's the hierarchy of the Four Sons and the core injunction to "teach your sons"—which, the 12th-century Rashbam explained, means "using words as bionic as sinew." Indeed, the Haggadah instructs the father of the "wicked son" to "knock out his teeth" [*"hakhay et sheenav"*], a metaphor of violence.

Elijah, interestingly, is a man's man in the Bible, not only inciting carnage and often in a rage, but also immortal and capable of bringing the dead back to life. It's funny how the more contemporary, folkloric Elijah has shuffled off to become a kind of *zeyde* in bed slippers.

Knowing these alpha-male memes adds a lot of resonance to Ellen Schecter's "Redemption." So does the fact that Schecter—a granddaughter rather than a grandson—went on to perform her own heartfelt "reconciliation" by authoring the classic Family Haggadah.

—S.S.



# My Daughter's Exodus... from Kunming, China

by NANCY COHEN ISRAEL

It is late January and we are celebrating Tu b'Shvat, Jewish Arbor Day, with its tiny whippers of Texan spring. It's also the time when I actually begin to think about Passover. Though the holiday is still two months away, the age-old ritual of cleaning every corner takes time. I will be enthusiastically assisted in this endeavor by my daughter Sarina, who, but for an enormous twist of fate, would be preparing not for Passover, but the Chinese New Year.

I often wonder how, as our six-year-old grows up, the Passover story will speak to her. The notions of hardship and exodus are particularly searing in relation to her roots, although so far anticipating Passover mostly means that Sarina's excited about chocolate lollipops, matzah balls and matzah toffee. Sarina attends a Jewish day school, so she has a good grounding in many aspects of the holiday. But as my husband and I parent her, we also find ourselves thinking

about the *other* side of the Passover story, the post-liberation side, in which, parallel to emancipation, the Hebrews spend 40 years wandering in a desert. Will Sarina wander? I wonder. Will she toggle internally in some way between Kunming and

Dallas? How will she understand her story?

My daughter's exodus began on January 1, 2005, when she was found abandoned at the entryway to a warren of dwellings in Kunming, the provincial capital of Yunnan. In China, there is no legal way for parents to give up their children. They must be abandoned, though abandonment is illegal, too. Every New Year's Day I am haunted by the thought of a two-week-old infant, possibly awakening from her nap, crying out for her mother who will never reappear. And I think of her birth mother—I'll call her "Yocheved" [Moses' mother]—hearing her cries and being powerless to hold or comfort her baby, or to keep her baby, except at the risk of government retribution.

If a Chinese birth mother is caught leaving a child, she risks everything, from losing her job to forced sterilization. And with the age-old cultural privileging of boys, keeping a girl can mean loss of



*Even as we  
prepare for  
Passover together,  
how many  
families are being  
torn apart?*

## MIRIAM'S CUP: A Ritual for Adoptive Mothers of Chinese Daughters

*Only you—adoptive moms and adopted daughters—know what ritual feels right for your circumstances, but here's one possibility for mothers. After the parsley (symbol of rebirth) is dipped in salty water (symbol of tears), raise Miriam's Cup and recite the following:*

Miriam's Cup, brimming with water, reminds us that Moses has two mothers: Yocheved, his birth mother, and Bithia, his adoptive one, daughter of Pharaoh. Moses' sister Miriam understood that sometimes it takes tandem mothers to create and rear a child, that neither Yocheved nor Bithia could do it on her own; each needed the other.

And so when Moses was three months old, and Yocheved had woven a little ark and lined it with bitumen and nestled her child inside and pushed it off into the Nile—that self-same river in which Pharaoh decreed "every Hebrew boy be drowned"—well, then, Miriam hid herself among thickets of papyrus, at a distance, the way Chinese birth mothers do when they place their babies inside lotus roots or

celery leaves, or in a crowded market or on a doorstep, weeping until a stranger finds the package and exclaims, "Whose beautiful child?"

Indeed, Pharaoh's daughter exclaimed exactly this, and it was she who named the baby Moses, explaining, "I drew him out of water." And Bithia adopted Moses, as Miriam—the prophetess—knew she would, and Bithia gave him life, and a feeling for his other mother, and she gave him privilege and a bicultural mission.

My daughter's other mother, I thank you. I do not know your name. I do not know you. You do not know me. We will never know each other. But we needed each other to create and love and nurture this child. I pray that you have found comfort and blessing.

You abound in blessings, God, creator and nurturer of the universe, who sustains us with living water. May we, like the children of Israel leaving Egypt, be guarded and nursed and kept alive in the wilderness, and may You give us wisdom to understand that the journey itself holds the promise of redemption. AMEN.

—Rabbi Susan Schnur

[\*thanks to Anchee Min]

face for both mother and daughter. Women often feel they have disgraced the family when they give birth to daughters.

I think about the emotional price that all of this exacts on the female population of China. In *The Lost Daughters of China* by Karen Evans, Anchee Min writes about the huge number of abandoned female infants brought up in foster care in China, and how the foster parents call the birth mothers “ghosts.” They “sneak around our houses,” Min quotes them as saying, “trying to locate the daughters they abandoned.”

China’s one-child policy was instituted in 1979 as a temporary way to prevent mass starvation, but it is still in effect 33 years later. Since international adoptions became legal in 1989, over 150,000 Chinese children have found new families all over the world, including 80,000 in the United States alone.

Do mothers who made the same agonizing decision as Sarina’s birth mother console each other, I wonder, or does each mother have her own heartbreaking secret? How does one abandon a child, put her down in a marketplace or a park and leave? What happens to these mothers emotionally? Sarina’s birth-mother will never know that her daughter is being raised in a loving family in a free country 11,000 miles away. I imagine her grief could be partly assuaged if only she could know this.

When I think about the Passover story, I think about China’s harrowing twentieth-century history, populations held captive by many Pharaohs, from the Qing dynasty to the Nationalists of the Kuomintang to the Japanese and finally to the Communists. Mao’s Great Leap Forward, from 1957 to 1961, precipitated a famine that forced millions to flee their homes and left 30 million dead—did Sarina have biological ancestors among them? In the new China, is anyone in Sarina’s biological family riding the wave of urban wealth, or are they destitute and forgot-

## A LETTER TO ALL THE LOST DAUGHTERS OF CHINA

by Anchee Min

I feel connected to you, orphans adopted from China. The Yangtze River runs in our blood.... We are all females, Chinese females, the kind an old saying describes as “grass born to be stepped on.”

Why is it the girls who are lost? Don’t take it personally. Please understand that Chinese women are cultivated to suffer. Giving away a daughter to someone, a childless sibling or a great aunt who is in need of caring, was considered a virtue. Girls were presents, companions, kitchen-hands, bed-mates, baby-making machines.... China is an agricultural country where hard labor is a means of survival—a man can carry 300 pounds of soil while a woman 150. See my point?

When I was five, my mother was pitied every time we went out. It was because she had three daughters. “Look, a string of crabs!”

...In 1995 I helped launch a movement called “Mothers, Save Your Daughters.” It started with a report...about a couple who murdered five of their infant daughters in the hope of gaining a son. The news shattered me. I believe that if only that couple had had education, the killing wouldn’t have happened. They were peasants and illiterate; they were not in touch with their consciences.

There are struggles of course. How can a mother not [struggle] after she carried you months in her body? You might be the result of her hesitation. She couldn’t do it; her heart opposed her and her hands shook. So she thought of an alternative. If a child is strong enough to endure, she might escape her fate.

Each of your birth mothers was not sure, but she wanted to do her best for you for the last time. She might have traveled as far as her money allowed her, to a richer area and a busier market where she would lay you down and hide you.... For her you will forever be a “broken arm hidden in her sleeve.”

Oh, how I wish your Chinese birth mothers could read this. They would be comforted, relieved, and released from nightmares that haunt them.

—excerpted from the introduction to *The Lost Daughters of China: Adopted Girls, Their Journey to America and the Search for a Missing Past* by Karin Evans.

ten in the countryside? And then my thoughts turn global. Who on our planet is trying to leave Egypt now? How many families, even as Sarina and I prepare for Passover together, are being torn apart?

**MY HUSBAND AND I** try to expose our daughter to her birth culture, though at this point in her life she considers herself more American than Chinese. She’s also been able to belt out the Four Questions in Hebrew since the age of three. But if the time comes that she asks us, like one of the Four Children, “What does all of this have to do with *me*?” I would like to offer her an answer that includes her biological as well as her adopted ancestors, if only, alas, in the abstract.

Certainly we will tell her that we hope that people everywhere,

regardless of nationality, race, class or ethnicity, can offer this to their children: we have suffered in bondage, we have endured in a wilderness, we now celebrate in freedom.

As she grows up and matures, I am sure Sarina will have her own Four Questions, maybe something like these: *Why couldn’t my birth parents keep me? What do my birth parents look like? Why did you want a Chinese daughter? And, Is there any more matzah toffee in the fridge?*

I hope my husband and I can give her answers that make sense to her. I hope we can give her strength for her own private journey. ■

*Nancy Cohen Israel lives in Dallas, Texas where she organizes and leads tours of art venues, teaches art history at Southern Methodist University, and writes about the art scene.*

# Counting in Seders

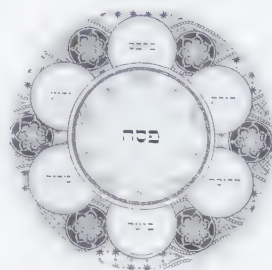
by JOANNE JACOBSON

“Next year in Jerusalem,” we call out together, as usual, at the end of our family seder in Chicago, while I silently wonder who among us will see another year. “If I die tonight, that would be good,” my cousin’s 98-year-old mother-in-law, housebound and blind, tells me before dinner. My aunt confides that the rent keeps going up at the retirement home where she moved last year, and she has no idea what will happen if she needs additional medical care. My mother’s oxygen tank hisses softly next to her place at the long Passover table.

The brick bungalow on the city’s South Side where my aunt and uncle hosted each year’s seder half a century ago is long gone; it burned to the ground in a mysterious fire soon after they sold it. We’d pack their dining room to the walls to retell the story of our people’s escape from Pharaoh’s bondage, across the wild waters. At the kids’ table, my cousins and I would fiddle with the heavy silver spoons and the linen napkins that Aunt Isabel and Uncle Herman brought out of storage each year, just for these two nights.

While the adults took their turns reading aloud—the heavily-accented English of the immigrant generation slowing everything to the raw edge of patience—we kids read the *Peanuts* comic books that my cousin Pammy inserted into each of our Haggadahs before the service. Finally the Maxwell House booklets would be stacked on the sideboard, the chicken soup and matzah balls would appear, and we’d eat for hours.

My aunts and my mother and grandmother always spent the entire day before the seder making gefilte fish: boiling carp and whitefish; slicing open the slick, flopping bodies; picking among the bones for hunks of warm flesh. Aunt Isabel



*When all of our seders become one.*

would turn the heavy handle of the iron grinder that she’d lugged up from my grandmother’s basement while my mother and her twin sister Shirley added matzah meal and eggs, cracking shells in succession and mixing quivering yellows and blobs of filmy gel until my grandmother was satisfied. The next night, in their holiday dresses and pearls, they’d open their palms over the seder table and laugh about the lingering stink of fish.

NOW MY MOTHER’S oxygen-depleted voice hardly carries across the noisy table. I talk with my cousin Danny about his impending retirement from NASA, and we remember the sleepovers at one another’s houses when we’d gather in front of the bulky TV to watch John Glenn, and other astronauts who followed him, blast into outer space. Who could have imagined that 30 years later one of us would be working for NASA? If we were lucky, we were allowed to stay up late, bundled in our soft pajamas, to watch Flash Gordon and Superman streaking across the heavens.

Danny tells me that his 90-year-old father is fighting to keep his car, even after his driver’s license has been revoked and his auto insurance cancelled. Uncle Arnold’s wife Beattie was the first of that genera-

tion to die, at only 52, after a brutal decade with cancer. At the funeral my sister and I, and Beattie’s best friend Ruth, were loaded into the back seat of a black Lincoln Town Car. When I reached over Ruth to lock the door, she searched my face briefly and then turned away and cried out: one raw sob, straight from the heart. This year, my sister has just turned 52.

At the 85th birthday party we gave last year for my mother and Aunt Shirley, my mother was so excited that she forgot to bring her after-dinner speech and we had to rush back to her house to fetch it. There in the hallway were the dozen quilted bags that she’s collected, to carry her oxygen tank, each a different color and pattern.

This year, the rolls of gefilte fish that my mother makes are from a frozen package. Before the seder, I see her inspecting cousin Evie’s gefilte fish, neat slices laid out under Saran Wrap in the kitchen. My mother is still calculating for the future.

“Next year,” she tells me, pushing off slowly from the counter and turning to face me, “I’m going to try it this way. Next year I’m going to roast the fish instead of boiling it.” She makes a note on a piece of Evie’s scrap paper, folds it and puts it in her pocket.

AFTER THE SEDER, riding the quiet, cocooning streets home, my mother will admit that she needs more oxygen this year than last, that she can no longer fight with the wind to walk outside, that she’s afraid to travel.

Still, we are lucky, I think. When we look around the Passover table, we know that here is more than just this place, that *now* is more than just this year. Much more than just tonight. ■

*Joanne Jacobson teaches at Yeshiva College. Her most recent book, Hunger Artist: A Suburban Childhood, is about growing up Jewish in suburban Chicago.*

# NAMING THE MATRIARCHY

*Often, women have had their names confiscated: married name, Ellis Island name, uninvited nickname. Here, three “deciders” seize the power of choosing, in ways big and small, bullish and inventive, multicultural and intellectual, norm-shattering and unapologetically subversive. Lilith welcomes the game changers.*

## My Hyphen

by ANNA SCHNUR-FISHMAN

**I** like it.

Family friends recently hyphenated their baby daughter, too. One day we were standing around their kitchen when a gaiety struck me and I burst out: “I can’t wait until Leah grows up and learns about her hyphen!”

That was when I realized that *I* love and am proud of my hyphen.

Leah’s parents were surprised by how many of their parenting friends *didn’t* choose to hyphenate—for one reason or another, the kid seemed to get Dad’s last name: Mom was estranged from her family; Mom had other siblings to carry on her name but Dad didn’t; Dad’s was more Jewish or less Jewish or whatever they were looking for. After a while, the ratio seemed more than coincidental.

I too am disturbed by the number of young, forward-thinking, liberal and feminist-identified couples opting for only Dad’s name. In a language class some years ago, each student explained the origin of his or her name. I said, “I have two last names. Sometimes people think it’s because I’m married, and sometimes people think it’s because my parents aren’t married, but it’s actually because my parents are feminists.” A second hyphenated student said her mother now regrets “doing that to” her—giving her the burdensome double last name. Our female professor said she considered hyphenating her daughter, but also didn’t want to “do that to her.” A friend to whom I repeated the

conversation told me that she had her mom’s maiden name as a middle name because her parents, too, were feminists...but that’s not the same!, I wanted to say.

Yes, I understand that double last names are unwieldy (no really—I do). Yet at the end of my life, however much time I have spent carefully spelling out the second of my last names over the phone to dentist-appointment schedulers and the like (20 hours? 40 hours?) will have been entirely worth it. My surname is the most concrete way that I know my parents believe in their equality, in the equality of the sexes, and in their shared role in childrearing. Their choice also ineluctably taught me that sometimes, to keep your life in line with your values, you have to consider options that are off the beaten track. I wouldn’t want to be named any other way; nor would I name my children any other way.

And yes, I know that children cannot practically accumulate the surnames of each of their ancestors over the generations. The goal here is not one of overwrought sentimentality—to carry on every family name forevermore—but to eschew sexism.

So I am not insisting that my grandchildren be, for instance, the Rifkin-Gold-Fleishman-Dali-Zynek-Borsky-Schnur-Fishman family, nor am I calling as evidence the places around the world where it is common to memorize ancestors’ names going back many generations.

**Indeed, I have thought long** and hard about all of this, and I've worked out a system I'd like to share: Women, pass on mothers' names; men, pass on fathers'.

Example: Schnur is my mother's name and Fishman is my father's. Let's say they have me and an imaginary brother, Otto, and an imaginary sister, Petunia. Otto and Petunia and I are all lucky enough to procreate with imaginary offspring of very famous political couples:

Petunia Schnur-Fishman + Derek Rodham-Clinton  
Joey Schnur-Clinton and Barbie Schnur-Clinton  
*Here Petunia passes on her mom's name (Schnur) and Derek passes on his dad's (Clinton).*

Otto Schnur-Fishman + Etta Rodham-Clinton  
Elena Fishman-Rodham and Dror Fishman-Rodham  
*Here Otto passes on his dad's name (Fishman), and Etta her mom's (Rodham).*

Anna Schnur-Fishman + Melissa Heinz-Kerry  
Georgette Schnur-Heinz and George Schnur-Heinz  
*Here both of us pass on our respective moms' names.*

Parents can opt to change their own names to match their kids', or keep their pre-nuptial handles.

A similar system is used in parts of Mexico, Mozambique, the Iberian Peninsula and elsewhere, though usually both parents pass on their fathers' names. The glitch in my system has to do with queer families: Whose name would *my* kids, Georgette

## *Having thought long and hard about hyphens, I've worked out a system.*

and George, pass on, having lesbian parents? Georgette has *two* moms' names and George has no dad's name. And whose name do folks pass on if they don't identify with one gender or the other? Write to me if you figure this out.

**When you've lived as a hyphenate**, you get to experience utilitarian benefits, too. For instance, I once emailed a stranger at work who replied, "Is there any chance you are *not* the offspring of Shoshe Schnur, whom I knew a million years ago in New York, and her husband Lenny Fishman?" This would never have happened if I were only Schnur or only Fishman, and in a world where apples roll geographically far from the tree, last names that confirm a certain origin are ever more useful.

In another take on this, at the bar mitzvah of a distant relative recently—I love this family, but usually have trouble remembering our exact genealogical relationship—I was contentedly spacing out in *shul* when something made me snap

back to attention. It was his grandmother being called to the Torah: "*Ta'amod, Anita bat Conrad v'Ruth.*" Conrad and Ruth—they're Conrad-'n-Ruth, my grandfather's uncle and aunt...making the bar mitzvah boy my third cousin, which I will not forget again.

I know that hyphenated names are often not very pretty, especially when two Ashkenazi families come together to produce a mouthful of consonants. As a kid, I loved to read the Yizkor plaques on synagogue walls—long bronze plaques, often running the length of an entire wall, listing the names of deceased congregants—to find the prettiest names. Next to each one is a light bulb, which is lit only a few times a year, at the anniversary of the person's death and when Yizkor is recited. I still remember the name Chaim Leaf from my childhood synagogue; it was my favorite. And I look out for beautiful names in general—on a plaque in my college library that named Trustees of 1949, for instance, I remember discovering the lovely Anna Canada Swain.

But that's appreciation, not jealousy; I wouldn't trade my name for any other.

**If you can give your child** a sense of humor and a little patience along with his or her hyphen (because, say, the surname might be too long to fit in the school computer system by just one letter, which for some reason gets bumped to the front of the first name, and on the first day of every class, roll call includes the name Nanna Schnurfishma)—then go ahead, parents. Hyphenate in good health! ■

*Anna Schnur-Fishman studied linguistics at Brown University and is happy to consult on naming decisions.*



# So, Baby Schultz, What Will You Call Me?

by SUSAN GELFMAN

**T**hank goodness you haven't arrived yet so I can still figure it out. You've got four choices: Grandma, Nana, *Bubbe* (Yiddish for grandmother) or *Savta* (Hebrew for grandmother). Am I making this too complicated? Impossible! Whatever you may be—boy or girl—you will be a *chacham*, a wise person, a genius!

"What difference does it all make?" you may ask, grandchild of mine. Once your *Ima's*, or mother's, mother was not Jewish. When I decided to become a Jew, like you, I chose a new name. I thought and thought and thought some more. I picked two names. One was Tirzah, a Jewish name from the Song of Songs. The other was Shoshana, for my own name, Susan. I remembered the name my parents gave me and I also took these new names. Even more so, Baby Schultz, I will think and think about the new name you will call me.

I, Tirzah Shoshana, am complicated, too. I am a blonde-haired, blue-eyed Daughter of the American Revolution and for 30-plus years now, a Jew. My daughter, also known as your Ima-to-be, is now not only a Jew and an American, but a citizen of Israel. You, Baby Schultz, who will be born in the holy city of Safed, will be a *sabra*, a native Israeli.

*Bubbe?* Real bubbes have grandmothers with Yiddish names like Mindel and Fayge and Sheindel. They sound like the daughters in *Fiddler on the Roof* who could burst into "Tradition" at any moment. They certainly don't have grandmothers named Mary—who became a faculty bride in the *shtetl* [small town] of Williamstown, Massachusetts and spent summer Sundays at Quaker meeting waiting for the spirit to strike.

Real bubbes came from places like Pinsk or Minsk. My bubbe grew up in the Republic of Cambridge, Massachusetts, home of



mix. If they made only two matzah balls, *dayenu*, it would have been enough. Two of their matzah balls would multiply and fill up your entire digestive tract. They don't make matzah balls that sink to the bottom of the soup bowl or disintegrate into clumps of gelatinous sludge at the top.

Real bubbes actually speak Yiddish, preferably when they don't want the American children to know what they're saying. They don't confine themselves to Yiddish insults: *they should have stones, not children*. All this is giving me a *kopveytik*, a headache. I don't think I'm destined to become a bubbe.

Perhaps I could be a *savta* then. After all, Baby Schultz, you will be a *sabra*, living between the Mediterranean Sea and the Sea of Galilee. It would only be fitting, yes? First off we have a basic problem. I can never remember which word means grandma and which word means grandpa. Does *savta* mean grandma or is it grandpa? Perhaps you can be a truly liberated child of two American immigrants and have two grandmas or two grandpas.

Real *savtas* know whether Ariel Sharon is alive or dead or in some bizarre state of suspended animation. They know what prominent politicians are on the take and how many terms Teddy Kollek was mayor of Jerusalem. Real *savtas* know how many days Gilad Shalit was held captive. They know what land was part of Israel before 1967 and what is now considered the territories, whatever Americans may have to say about it.

Real *savtas* are scrappy. They don't take any guff from taxi drivers and demand that they put on the *monit*, the meter, instead of paying a fee fit only for tourists. They know how to drive in Israel without becoming a traffic fatality. During the intifada, they elbowed their way onto Jerusalem buses, vehicles which might blow up and scatter their remains on the sidewalk. They have grandsons who never came back from the War in Lebanon or clashes on the West Bank and in Gaza. They do not have husbands who were conscientious objectors and who are ambivalent about the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. No, sorry, *sabra* Schultz, I cannot be a *savta*.

*Nana wears tartans. Savta doesn't take any guff from taxi drivers.*

*Grandmas are an equal-opportunity job category, open to all comers.*

Harvard University and all spectrums of the rainbow coalition. Many, many bubbes back, her ancestors were immigrants too, but they came to Plymouth Rock in the 17th century, not to Ellis Island in the nineteenth.

Real bubbes make a mean matzah ball. They don't immediately panic and run to the store for the Manishevitz matzah ball

Perhaps being a grandma is the way to go. Grandmas are an equal-opportunity job category, open to all comers. They celebrate Christmas or Chanukah or Kwanzaa. Or perhaps celebrate Christmas and Chanukah and Kwanzaa. They grew up in Sandusky, Ohio or Scarsdale, New York or the South Bronx. They voted for Obama or McCain, or perhaps did not vote at all. They are the face of the melting pot. But do I really want to blend in? Isn't part of being a Jew to be somehow apart?

So what's it to be, Baby Schultz? Nana, perhaps. Real nanas speak with a brogue or a Scottish burr. They know how to pronounce Edinburgh and Siobhan. Their nana's nana spoke Gaelic. They will actually eat a haggis, even if it is a sheep intestine.

Nanas have names like Campbell with a long and inglorious history. They have not been forgiven for the Massacre at Glencoe in the Scottish Highlands over 300 years ago. After enjoying the hospitality of the MacDonalds for a week, Campbells killed 78 of their unarmed hosts. Tour guides still point out their dastardly deeds. They have ancestral castles which dun them for money for their upkeep. They'll sell anyone a coat of arms, C.O.D. Close your ears, Baby Schultz, the Campbell coat of arms has a big yellow boar's head. Not for eating, of course.

Their motto is "*ne obliviscaris*," "never forget" to the non-Latin speakers among us.

Nanas wear tartans. The Campbell tartan is like the Black Watch plaid, navy and forest green. A nana would know whether it was the tartan of the Campbells of Argyll or the Campbells of Cawdor. (Psst, Baby Schultz, keep it simple. You can get a Campbell tie at L.L. Bean. I wonder if they have a crib blanket?)

So, Baby Schultz, the time is fast approaching that I must decide. The fact is that you will have plenty of bubbe-ness and savta-ness. Your *Abba's* [father's] mother makes an unsinkable matzah ball. You will have plenty of savtas pinching your cheek in the supermarket and watching out for you on the street. That's what Israelis do. You won't forget the grandmas either as you listen to your parents talk in English and speak Hebrew with their foreign inflections. But who will keep the memory of the nanas? Just me, this Nana. It's about the feel of a wool tartan scarf against my cheek and the echoes of Scotland the Brave at my Dad's memorial. As all Jews know, it's about remembering. ■

*Susan Gelfman is a first-generation Jew and a 13th-generation American who writes about the ironies of this strange heritage.*

## Que(e)rying the Matrilineal Principle

by SUSAN GOLDBERG

**I** remember clearly the day that my religious studies teacher, Rabbi Meyerovitch, explained to us—a group of seventh-grade girls at the private Jewish elementary school I attended in Vancouver, British Columbia—the rabbinic law that determined who got to be “born Jewish.”

He was about as direct as one might expect a grizzled, sixty-something Orthodox man to be about such matters, but he tried his best. A child follows the religion of the mother, he explained, because—and here he coughed—“well... you can always be sure of who the mother is.”

We looked at him blankly.

He continued: “But...you can't always be sure of the father.”

It took me a few minutes, but I caught on eventually. At the time, the rabbinic logic made perfect sense to my 12-year-old mind: if any poor shmuck pointed out by the mother could

conceivably be the father, then of course the baby should follow the religion of the “knowable” parent, the parent to whose body it was irrefutably, undeniably tethered. Fatherhood as a concept was murky, shifting. But motherhood? You could count on that. You could see it with the naked eye.

I was drawn, I suspect, to what I now know is called the “matrilineal principle” of Jewish identity for reasons beyond its putative logic. It was, in effect, the equivalent of a “get out of jail free” card for Conservative Jewish girls like me, girls who weren't entirely convinced that they would grow up to marry nice Jewish boys, preferably lawyers or doctors. While I had no definite plans to marry outside the fold of Judaism, I knew my adolescent self well enough to sense that I might one day entertain the possibility. And it was comforting to know that even if, one day, I married a *goy*, I would still be able to provide my parents with

the ultimate prize: Jewish grandchildren. It seemed like one of the few instances in which—religiously, at least—I had the upper hand over my brother.

**Twenty five years later**, things have played out in ways I never quite imagined. I am married, yes, but not to a nice Jewish boy. My spouse is nice, yes, but is a (mostly) lapsed Catholic, and is most definitely not a boy. (For what it's worth, Rachel is a doctor, although, as we like to joke, not the kind of doctor who can take out your appendix.)

And then there are our children: two boys, age seven and four. Two boys with two mommies, one Jewish and one Catholic.

When I met her, Rachel adamantly did not want to have children—let alone be pregnant. That was fine with me: at the age of 22, children were on the far periphery of my vision. I had plenty of time, I thought, to figure out the baby thing. If I decided children were a priority, I could try to convince Rachel to come along for the adventure, or, heartbreakingly, go it alone. Either way, the children would be Jewish.

Those assumptions were challenged when, several years later, Rachel's youngest sister, at the time living in Tanzania, sent around an email message announcing that she was “up the duff.” Rachel, to my shock, immediately got broody. All of a sudden, motherhood and pregnancy—potentially *her* pregnancy—had moved from the periphery to the center, and we began a complex and protracted discussion of exactly what all of this might entail.

We had one crucial variable covered: a willing sperm donor that we'd picked out, just in case, years before. Rob was that perfect and rare commodity: a healthy, smart, handsome and sweet gay man who liked kids but had no interest in raising his own. We struck gold with Rob. The fact that he wasn't Jewish was, from my perspective, just a minor blip—as long as I was the one getting pregnant. The matrilineal principle would render the babies automatically Jewish—no harm, no foul.

But when Rachel began to ponder the possibility of getting pregnant herself, I found myself struggling. In part, for a variety of personal, financial, and career-related reasons, I didn't feel ready to be a parent, period. But—standing at the crossroads of *interfaith* and *same-sex*—I was confused and torn about what it might mean for me to be the Jewish, non-biological mother of children borne by my Gentile spouse, with the help of our Gentile donor. Would the kids be Jewish? According to whom? Did it really matter, and why?

Further, why was it that biology and a single ancient rabbinical law held so much sway over my perspective? No other Jewish laws did. I had no problem flaunting, say, rabbinic proscriptions against women engaging in sexual acts with other women. I didn't keep kosher, didn't keep the Sabbath, had undoubtedly worn linen-wool blends. I didn't even believe in God. And yet, here I was, clinging to a fairly arbitrary principle that seemed to go against the rest of my politics. Why, for example, was it



acceptable—or even possible—to transmit identity to offspring through one gender but not the other? And the whole idea of the inherent “knowability” of the (biological) mother made little sense in the context of queer parenting, where family is as much if not more about chosen—and earned—kinship ties than biology. Plus, the matrilineal principle is at heart sexist, based on a premise that women are not to be trusted. “That baby,” the rabbi thought, “well, it could be anyone’s.”

**And yet, there I was**, holding on to the idea that the only way that my kids could be Jewish, short of Rachel converting, would be for me to give birth to them. (Rachel, by the way, had no intention of converting, and refused the notion of converting a baby. “Nobody’s dunking my kid in water and washing away its *goyishe* mother,” she said. I could hardly argue.)

I should note that, in two-mom households where one partner gives birth, it’s common for non-biological mothers to worry that they will not have the same bond to the baby as the partner who carried and gave birth and perhaps breast-fed—they fret that they won’t have their partner’s physiological and genetic ties to the kids, and that that will make them, somehow, less equal as parents.

It may well be that my fears around our children’s religious status were related to these issues, but the more I pondered it, the more I realized that something else was at play: my unexamined beliefs about Judaism itself as an essential, biological, even racial, identity. If Jewishness is inherent, that is, then one’s birth, as opposed to one’s actions, determine identity. So, my twisted logic went, it didn’t matter whether I drove on Saturdays or ate BLTs or married a woman. *I was still Jewish*. I might be a bad Jew, or at least a very non-observant Jew, but I was *essentially* Jewish. And I wanted to pass that essence on to my children.

To be fair, I did have one powerful reason to think of Judaism as a genetic identity: my family history of breast cancer, undeniably mapped out in our DNA from generation to generation. We suspect that my maternal great-grandmother may have died of breast cancer. We know for certain that my maternal grand-

mother died of ovarian cancer in her late forties. My mother was diagnosed with ovarian cancer at the age of 37, and with breast cancer a decade later. By the time she was diagnosed yet again—a recurrence of breast cancer, now metastasized—genetic research had identified the mutation in the BRCA gene that was responsible for both my mother's and grandmother's cancer. They also confirmed that one in 45 Ashkenazi Jews carries the mutation, as opposed to one in 800 to 1000 people in the general population. My own doctors were following me closely: I had a one in two chance of inheriting the potentially deadly mutation. I tended to imagine my ovaries, my breasts, as pairs of ticking time bombs. For me, being Jewish and being genetically at risk were inextricably linked.

To further complicate my confusion, my mother's latest battle with cancer overlapped with Rachel's and my ongoing

## *I am in charge of the ethics of what it means to be, at once, a Jew, queer, spouse, mother, daughter.*

baby discussions. If children had once been on the periphery of my vision, my mother's failing health made my desire for a child—more specifically, my desire to be pregnant—visceral. I wanted my parents, but my mother in particular, to meet my children, her grandchildren. I wanted her to accept them wholeheartedly. I wanted to make her happy.

By this point, nearly a decade into my relationship with Rachel, my parents had embraced their queer, Catholic daughter-in-law as one of the family. And yet I harbored the suspicion that they might not be fully prepared to accept as their own—and as Jewish—grandchildren borne by my Gentile girlfriend. I talked about it with my mother only once, fairly early on, when Rachel was still quite intent on getting pregnant. The conversation was awkward. "And this would be your child, too?" asked my mother.

"Yes," I said. "I would legally adopt it."

"And we would be the grandparents?"

"Yes," I said, firmly. "Just as you would be the grandparents of any child I adopted." My tone, I hoped, conveyed the unspoken *you'd better get used to it* appended to the end of the sentence. We didn't say much more.

*You'd better get used to it.* It was potent advice. And I came to realize that I needed to take it myself. I needed to get used to the idea that, for better or for worse, I was in charge of the ethics of what it meant for me to be, at once, a Jew, queer, a spouse, a mother, a daughter. I had to give up all my "get out of jail free" cards: my deference to ancient and arbitrary rules, my conflation of genetics with "identity." I needed to step up, create my own rules, and take responsibility for my particular brands of religion, culture, family. If I wanted to convince my parents that my children were their grandchildren, I needed to believe it myself.

**Our older son** was born three days after what would have been my mother's sixtieth birthday, six months after she finally succumbed to her 20-year, on-again-off-again, battle with cancer. He is named for her, and not a single day goes by that I do not ache at the fact that she has never met him, or his younger brother. Before our second son was conceived, I finally got up the nerve to get tested for the BRCA mutations. As it turns out, I am not a carrier: that particular link in the genetic chain connecting me to my maternal ancestors has been, happily, broken. With that break, however, seems to have come more room for the possibility of creating my own way forward.

As for motherhood, it turns out that it's not necessarily easily visible. The kinship ties of our little family, at least, are rarely immediately clear to strangers. The biological details of our sons' conceptions and births have never been secret, but Rachel and I divulge them carefully, to distinguish between those who ask about them out of supportive curiosity and those who ask out of the discomfort of not knowing and the need to inscribe some (hetero)normative idea of family onto ours.

The children are Jewish, and Rachel and I are raising them in a Jewish household. Our traditions continue to develop and evolve, and include plenty of room for celebrations

with my extended Jewish family and my Gentile in-laws—not to mention with Rob and his family. Sometimes we fall back on the comfort of the traditions I grew up with: lighting the candles and saying the blessing over wine and challah every Friday night. Sometimes we break with tradition to figure out ways of celebrating that make sense to us: making "Esther" and "Vashti" flags to wave as we tell the story of Purim, including "*Kos Miriam*" on our Seder plate as a reminder of Jewish women's contributions to the Exodus and Jewish life.

The boys are Jewish not because of who gave birth to them, but because of what Rachel and I have decided feels right to us as partners and as co-parents. When they're older, they may choose other paths, and we will do our best to support them. Occasionally, the responsibility and the sheer work involved in creating our own path forward feel overwhelming, but it's necessary work if we want our children to make informed, responsible decisions about their lives, rather than simply deferring to unexamined authority. Until the kids are old enough to make their own decisions, a new brand of matrilineality reigns at our house, and it is this: we're the moms, so we get to decide.

[I am indebted to Shaye J.D. Cohen's analysis of the matrilineal principle in *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* and to Elaine Chapnik's essay, "Through The Rabbinic Lens: A Study of *Hilchot Lesbiut*," in the anthology *Keep Your Wives Away from Them: Orthodox Women, Unorthodox Desires*.]

*Susan Goldberg is a freelance writer, editor and blogger, and co-editor of the anthology And Baby Makes More: Known Donors, Queer Parents, and Our Unexpected Families. Her essays, poetry and stories have appeared in a variety of publications. She blogs at [www.mamanongrata.com](http://www.mamanongrata.com).*

## Pretty Crazy

### *Laboring to be Beautiful*

"Life is too interesting to focus on my hips," an older friend once told me, and I remember wishing that I could agree. In *The Beauty Bias* (Oxford, \$17.95)

**Deborah L. Rhode** laments that much of the effort and concern that individuals now invest in their appearance could be better spent, and that the consequences of our cultural preoccupation with appearance require legal redress. Rhode, a law professor at Stanford, begins with a personal account of her own "ludicrous experience" of having her wardrobe vetted by the American Bar Association so as to select a suitable outfit for her to wear to the organization's annual luncheon. The irony was not lost on Rhode, who was

on grooming than on books. While over one-sixth of Americans lack access to basic health care, cosmetic procedures are the fastest growing medical specialty—with women accounting for 90% of the procedures. Rhode shows how our preoccupation with appearance overlaps with other prejudices: the first Americans to seek cosmetic surgery in significant numbers were Jews who wanted less distinctive noses, or members of other ethnic groups who did not want to look Jewish.

The beauty industry is just one among many biological, market, technological, and media forces that drive our focus on appearance, from women's magazines with their focus on "fashion, figures, food, and furnishings" to "Say it with Liposuction," the Valentine's Day gift "for the woman who has everything." And then there is

seven American jurisdictions that ban appearance discrimination as part of their civil rights law, highlighting cases such as *Tardif v. Quinn* (1976), in which a public high school official fired a teacher because he disapproved of the length of her skirt. And she exhorts us to shift our individual and collective focus from aesthetics and cosmetics to health and fitness.

Rhode's argument is part of a larger conversation about the relationship between beauty and justice. Harvard English professor **Elaine Scarry's** *On Beauty and Being Just* (Princeton, \$14.95) was a poetic exploration of the relationship between aesthetics and ethics. Scarry argues that beauty presses us towards a greater concern for justice by leading us away from our self-preoccupation and towards a concern for others. Whereas Rhode contends that our aesthetic concerns prevent us from judging others fairly, Scarry points to the etymological evidence: "fair" means both "lovely" and "just," suggesting an overlap between the two.

Of course, this conversation goes back centuries—not just to Plato but to our own religious tradition. The Mishna famously states, "Do not look at the vessel but at what is inside it"—yet other rabbinic sources suggest a more complex relationship between surface and depth. The Talmud relates that Rabbi Elazar ben Rabbi Shimon once encountered an ugly man and insulted him—a clear case of appearance discrimination. The ugly man responded, "Go tell the artist who made me: How ugly is this vessel that you made." Rabbi Elazar is reminded that all human beings are created in God's image, and to insult a person's appearance is to insult the divine Maker. The rabbis teach that when we encounter someone who is beautiful, we should praise God by uttering a special blessing. We all have aesthetic biases, but

## Our aesthetic concerns prevent us from judging others fairly: "fair" means both "lovely" and "just."

chair of a commission seeking to promote equality for women in the profession. This experience sensitized her to the double standard of attractiveness for men and women, and to the reality of living in a world in which "shoe design may be the last politically acceptable haven for closet misogynists."

Gender is just one aspect of what Rhode terms the "beauty bias," the appearance-based discrimination which influences employment, income, self-esteem, and personal relationships. She cites a range of statistical studies about our investment in appearance, including the distressing fact that Americans spend more money

the billion-dollar beauty pageant industry, which Rhode dates back not to the first Miss America Pageant in 1921 but at least 24 centuries earlier to the Persian Queen Vashti's celebrated refusal to appear naked before her husband's drunken revelers.

*The Beauty Bias* is not just a survey of aesthetic demands in American culture, but an impassioned call to action. Rhode argues for a legal response to appearance-based discrimination to promote equal opportunity in the workplace, outlaw fraudulent advertising claims, and relieve the disproportionate burdens placed on women as a result of sex-based double standards. She offers a survey of the

Jewish tradition encourages us to recognize that everything in this world—the beautiful and the ugly—comes from the same divine source, a God who demands that we behave justly and righteously in our dealings with one another.

“Beauty may be only skin deep, but that is deep enough to confer an unsettling array of disadvantages,” Rhode asserts. Perhaps her book is most valuable in holding up a mirror to our own aesthetic prejudices; though ideally, as Scarry contends, our contemplation of the beautiful would inspire loftier reflections.

**ILANA KURSHAN** works in book publishing in Jerusalem.

## Émigrés in America War

*Love, After the War*

*The Oriental Wife* (Other Press, \$15.95) by **Evelyn Toynton** begins in World War I-era Nuremberg, with an innocent-seeming scene of three children at play. Louisa is sweet-tempered and eager to please; her cousin Otto is as understanding as he is outgoing; and shy, self-conscious Rolf hides behind an emotionless exterior. All from well-to-do assimilated Jewish families, they are clueless as to what is obvious

to the reader: their futures will prove anything but rosy, unless they escape.

With a little foresight and luck, they do—Rolf and Otto find their way to New York, while Louisa goes to finishing school in Switzerland. It is the first of several stops where she will play the

of New York, she would seem to have found a place of comfort at last, especially after her marriage to Rolf. But her earlier sufferings and sense of displacement are no guarantee against future ones: when a brain tumor leaves her partially paralyzed, her husband leaves her, seizing custody of

**She does not realize that as a Jew she does not fit the family criteria for a wife.**

thankless role of uncomprehending outsider. She falls for the snobbish brother of a British classmate and follows him to London, where he soon abandons her; she does not realize, until too late, that as a Jew she does not fit the family criteria for a wife. She then takes up with a charming but unstable journalist, whom she accompanies to New York as his assistant and fiancé—until his enchantment with her quaint-seeming manners and inability to understand his brand of socialist politics turns to abuse and rage. Will she fit in anywhere?

Reuniting with her childhood chums amid the Jewish immigrant community

their daughter. One character comments, “If we knew when we were born what lay in store for us, none of us would have the courage to see it through.” It’s a grim story, told with acuity and elegance, of a life that seems sadly destined to be always alien to its surroundings.

Canadian novelist **Gabriella Goliger** also explores a woman’s sense of otherness in her coming-of-age novel, *Girl Unwrapped* (Arsenal Pump Press, \$15.95). Growing up as the daughter of Holocaust survivors in Montreal’s Jewish community in the conformist 1950s, Toni Goldblatt feels different from her classmates. First, unlike their neighbors, her



German-Viennese parents are non-observant, non-Yiddish speaking, and almost indifferent to the newly founded state of Israel. Second, Toni is a tomboy—the opposite of the feminine daughter her parents had dreamed of when they named her for a beloved grandmother who perished in the death camps. As she grows into adolescence and young adulthood, Toni struggles to come to terms with her sexual attraction to women. She agonizes that she is neither a “he” nor a “she” but an unwelcome “it” in a world that has no place for such beings.

This fear is reinforced as Toni fails again and again in her attempts to fit

in—in high school, where her “A” average sets her apart; at a Jewish summer camp, where she falls for a female music teacher unable to reciprocate; and in Jerusalem, where she tries to go straight, but is instead ostracized because the man whom she allowed to seduce her was Arab. It’s only as a college student at McGill that she begins to grow comfortable with her sexual identity, and develop a community in which she is no longer the outsider. Instead of being singled out as different, she has found a place in which she can revel in “space and silence and the freedom to be naked,” Gollinger writes. “She is no longer the chosen. She chooses....

She is home.” Goliger’s coming-of-age story thus doubles as a story of coming out. While the dialogue can be stilted, the emotions are real. And unlike poor Louisa in *The Oriental Wife*, Toni does succeed in finding a place to call her own.

**DIANE COLE** is the author of the memoir *After Great Pain: A New Life Emerges* and book columnist for the journal *The Psychotherapy Networker*.

## Cleaning House

*Israeli Novelist Turns to Memoir*

My husband’s grandmother, so the family story goes, carried a dust cloth over her

## Girl Heroines in 1930s Shanghai, 1938 Vienna, 1950s New York, 2011 Narita, 2011 Baltimore and Atlanta

IN THE 1950s, in McCarthy-era New York, the political activist father of high school junior Jamie has just gotten out of jail. Despite a lot of frank and caring talk within the extended Jewish family, the shame and isolation of teenagers—Jamie and her close friend—loom large. Set in an era when abortion was illegal and dangerous, *In Trouble* (Carolrhoda, \$17.95), by **Ellen Levine**, is an engaging and sobering novel. Jamie’s Catholic friend Elaine confides in her, and uses her as a cover to spend time secretly with her college-age boyfriend. Elaine persists in believing he will marry her, even though he disappears once the reality of her pregnancy sinks in. Jamie hesitantly seeks advice on behalf of her friend, who, to Jamie’s consternation, wants to keep her baby. As the book unfolds, we learn that Jamie has her own traumas. In a note, Levine reminds us that, even in the 21st century, the options available to girls facing unwanted pregnancies are under threat.

**Laurel Snyder** brings us, in two middle-grade novels, the painful feelings and plucky adventures of two bookish girls who courageously face difficult situations and come out stronger for having struggled with adversity.

In *Penny Dreadful* (Yearling/Random House, \$7.99), a sheltered home-schooled girl’s dad quits his job on the fast track and the family starts to unravel. Then the mom learns that she has inherited from an eccentric great aunt a house in a distant rural community. The family hopes moving there will give them a chance for a new start. They soon learn, however, that the aunt had borrowed against the house and that they are responsible for her huge debts. Our protagonist shows remarkable courage as the family joins the 99%.

In Snyder’s *Bigger Than a Breadbox* (Random House, \$16.99), 12-year-old Rebecca Rose Shapiro is aware of her parents’ arguments

and sadness and their differences—one of which is that her dad is Jewish and her mom is not. But she is not prepared to be loaded with her little brother into a car and driven without warning from Baltimore to Atlanta so her mother can sort things out. Rebecca is furious with her mother, misses her dad, her home, and her friends. Then she discovers a breadbox in her grandmother’s attic that magically fills up with whatever she wishes. Some of her wishes get her into serious trouble, leading to a brave denouement.

*Anya’s War* (Feiwel/MacMillan, \$16.99), by **Andrea Alban**, is an ambitious historical novel. A Jewish family finds refuge from the religious persecutions in 1937 Odessa by relocating to the French Quarter of Shanghai. Anya’s mother is an opera star, her aunt a physician, and her hero the fearless pilot Amelia Earhart. The rich cast of characters includes a father, a brother, a set of demanding grandparents and a young female house servant expert in Chinese folk beliefs. Anya returns from the market on her bicycle one Friday afternoon and discovers an abandoned newborn baby girl she is determined to rescue.

*Orchards* (Delacorte \$17.95) by **Holly Thompson** is narrated in free verse by protagonist Kana Goldberg. Following the suicide of an eighth-grade classmate who had been thoughtlessly excluded by a clique of girls, Kana is sent from New York for the summer to her mother’s ancestral orange farm in rural Japan. It is the third summer after Kana’s grandfather’s death, and her grandmother is still mourning, and still disapproving of her Jewish son-in-law. The spare but evocative text conveys strangeness, puzzlement, and the meaningful changes that happen through small interactions. Just before the end of her summer, another crisis occurs in New York, and Kana’s Japanese

shoulder at all times. When the phone rang she would dust her way, from wherever she happened to be, making a resolute path to the telephone table at the farthest end of the apartment. Invariably when she picked up the receiver, the line was dead. "Misteam anti-Zzzzzemite!" she'd sputter. My own grandmother showed me once how to dust a table. The task began with lifting a lamp off the table, unscrewing the finial, removing the lamp shade, dusting lamp and shade separately, putting them back together, screwing down the finial, placing the lamp "gently" on the floor, lifting the table off the rug, "getting underneath..." It was exhausting!

What was it with these women, diminutive, iron-willed matriarchs whose sworn enemies were dust and dirt and mud?

**Meir Shalev** commemorates the archetype in his wittily elegiac *My Russian Grandmother and Her American Vacuum Cleaner*, a family memoir (translated from the Hebrew by Evan Fallenberg, Schocken Books, \$25.95). As Shalev explains, his grandmother, a pioneer in the Jezreel Valley, was phobic about dirt. Besides the dust cloth she carried on her shoulder, she kept an army of lesser rags on handles of doors, bureaus, cupboards, and windows. Every day began with the ritual of scrubbing floors and wringing

rags. And her enormous General Electric vacuum was locked in a bathroom and never used, because an imperfection in one of its sealing rings raised the possibility that someday a small amount of dust might escape from its interior cloth bag.

The gently comedic story of Grandma Tonia's vacuum, replete with digression and variations, allows for a glimpse of a family with Tonia as its essence: "stubborn, vindictive, jealous, obsessive, and excessive...she was our source of strength..." She had come to Palestine from the Ukraine in 1923 after her grandfather was hanged in a pogrom. When she was 18 years old, she married her older

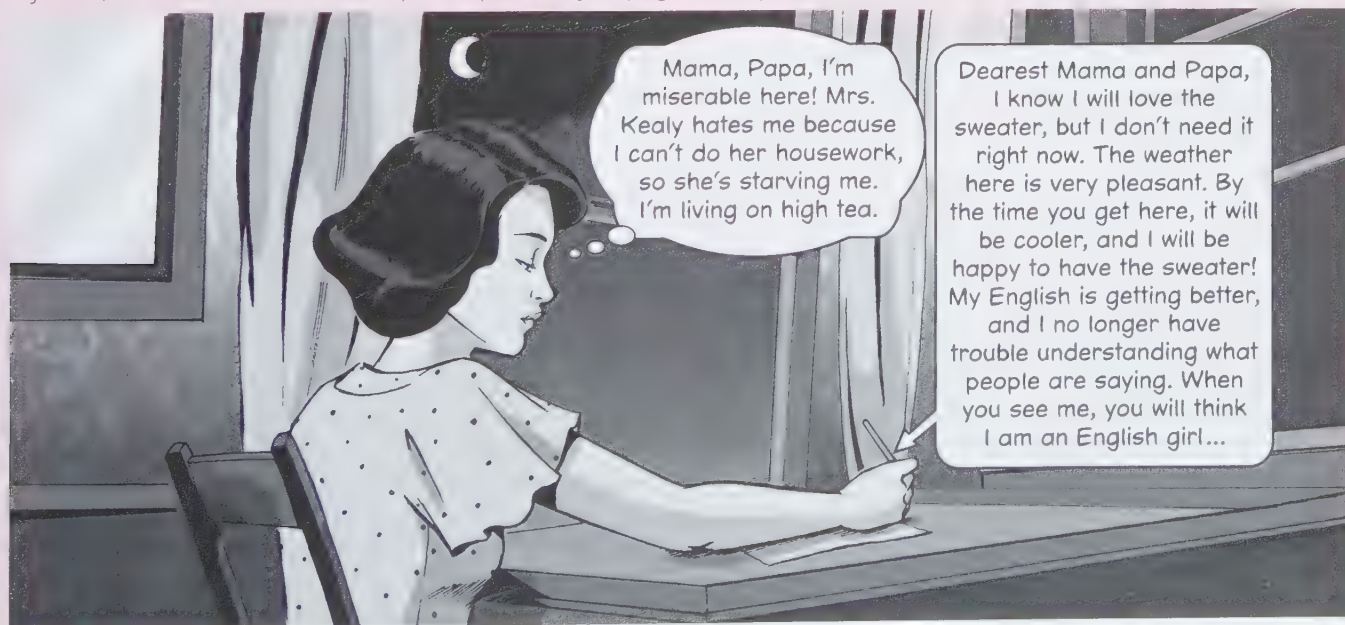
family rallies to care for her. When she returns to New York, she is able to draw on her experience in Japan and her Jewish heritage to cope.

**Lily Renee, *Escape Artist: From Holocaust Survivor to Comic Book Pioneer*** (Graphic Universe/Lerner \$7.95), by **Trina Robbins** and illustrated by **Anne Timmons** and **Mo Oh**, is the biography of a girl who experienced the best of cultured Vienna, until the Anschluss. Robbins, a cartoonist and self-described "herstorian," tells Renee's story—how her parents sent her on the Kindertransport

to stay with a family in England, how she ran away, was eventually reunited with her parents, and about her professional success. Among the many highlights of Lily Renee's career, she drew the comic character Senorita Rio, the Brazilian nightclub entertainer who secretly fought Nazis in South America. "Through Senorita Rio," writes Robbins, "Lily Renee was able to do what she couldn't do on her own.... Beat the Nazis."

NAOMI DANIS

Lily Renee, at the home of her Kindertransport adoptive family, keeping her misery to herself, writes a letter to her parents in Vienna



sister's widower—a Zionist and socialist who “inclined towards things other than agriculture.” She raised his two sons from the earlier marriage (a source of great bitterness) and gave birth to five more children. Through all the vicissitudes, she held the family together and made sure they kept their farm even when “marshy sludge filled the yards and the cows and the farmers waded knee-deep in it.” If she took out her rage on filth, endless cleaning was the price such women paid for holding it together for everyone else.

As Shalev acknowledges, Tonia's artistry showed up in other places—in anything having to do with plums (plum cake and plum jam, for instance), and in her wonderful stories that began in a thick Russian accent: “This is how it was...” (a phrase that serves as the book's original Hebrew title). The book has the lovingly teasing quality of family reminiscence, especially when Shalev honors Tonia's sharp tongue and unembarrassed fusion of languages and idiom: “Don't scritch me the walls with it,” “You watch out, Batyaleh, this guy is one decent bird!” “You're not going to inherit me as long as I'm alive,” and (my favorite, since my grandmother said it as well) “It was a terrible death.”

**FRANCES BRENT**, whose last book is *The Lost Cellos of Lev Aronson*, is working on a biography of the modern architect Samuel Marx.

## Fictional Frumkayt

### *Jews Write Religion*

Reading **Nora L. Rubel's** *Doubling the Devout: The Ultra-Orthodox in the American Jewish Imagination* (Columbia, \$24.50) is a bit like listening in on a therapy session. On the couch is the American Jewish community, and we are discussing our concerns about our more religious brethren.

Rubel's book examines a change in American Jewish literature over the past twenty-five years that mirrors a shift in American Jewish culture during the same period. By looking at the work of contemporary novelists such as Pearl Abraham,

Allegra Goodman, Dara Horn, Tova Mirvis, Naomi Ragen, and Anne Roiphe, and examples from film (*A Price Above Rubies*, *A Stranger Among Us*) and televi-

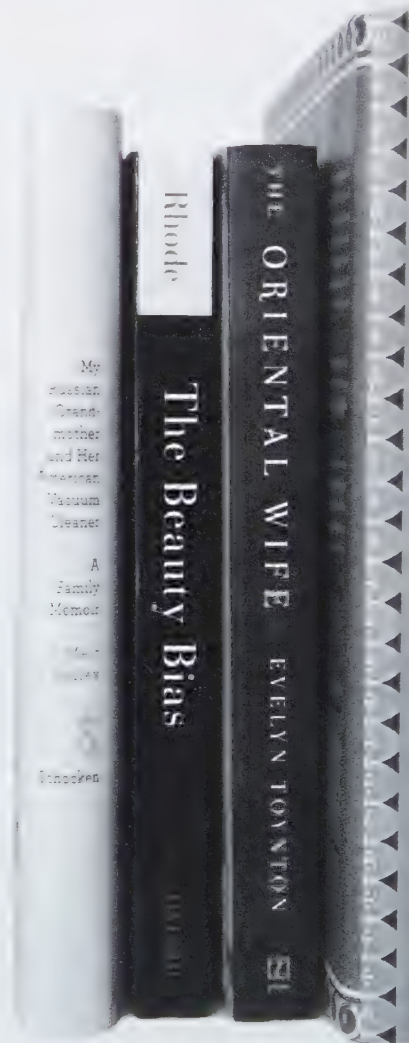
sion (*Law & Order*), Rubel highlights the rightward trend in Jewish Orthodoxy and the dissatisfactions many American Jews express toward it.

Fictional portraits of Orthodox Jews were once nostalgic and complimentary, from Abraham Cahan to Chaim Potok. In the past 25 years, however, Jewish writers have been more censorious when it comes to their depictions of the Orthodox. Rubel writes convincingly that the change has to do with “differing views on how to reconcile Judaism with the general culture” that have resulted in a growing cultural polarization among American Jews. Since the mid-1980s, when the Conservative movement began ordaining women as rabbis (as had already been done in the Reform and Reconstructionist movements), Orthodoxy's isolation from mainstream American Jewish culture—especially regarding women's role in public religious life—has increasingly become a thorn in the side of mainstream American Jews. In Tova Mirvis's *The Outside World*, modern Orthodox parents look on with trepidation and a sense of helplessness as their son becomes enveloped in ultra-Orthodoxy: “They had seen their friends' children pass through this stage of fervent religiosity. They had heard stories about children who came home from Israel and carted off all the dishes in the house to be dunked in the local mikvah. If they could, these children would kidnap their parents and dunk them too.”

In her chapter “Muggers in Black Coats,” on friction between parent and child, Rubel quotes from a 2008 *Forward*

“bintel brief” letter in which a father laments the marriage of his “brilliant college graduate with a law degree” daughter to a Chabadnik: “It's obvious that if she

marries this parasite, she will become a second-class citizen and a baby factory and I'll never have any contact with my children.” It's as if the rules have suddenly changed. This father, like so many of the parents in Rubel's fictional examples,



believed he was doing right by his child in providing access to both the riches of American secular culture and a proud, American Jewish identity. To the parent it appears that the child is turning her back on both of the two worlds (secular American and mainstream Jewish) that her parents have presented to her and opting for door number three: ultra-orthodoxy.

Less convincing is Rubel's contention that liberal Jews see the ultra-Orthodox as threatening to Jewish claims of Americanness. This would have seemed true in the immediate postwar era when American acceptance of Judaism was in its early stages. Thankfully, Jews' American identity is more secure and America more accepting of religious and cultural difference.

Central to this culture war between the ultra-Orthodox and mainstream American Jewish culture is what Rubel describes as authority over the definition of Jewish identity. Who decides what is authentic and legitimate Judaism and whether this should be compatible with modernity or a replication of traditional Judaism is at the crux of American Jewish contention over ultra-Orthodoxy. Women's voices have been particularly prominent among critics of traditional Judaism for the obvious reason of ultra-Orthodoxy's exclusivist attitude toward them. One wishes for more male authors among Rubel's sampling if only to know that men have been as disquieted about issues of gender and Judaism.

Rubel does a beautiful job showing that Jewish anxiety around defection to the ultra-Orthodox is multi-layered: parents are not only worried about what their children are giving up by choosing a haredi life, but about how that choice functions as an indictment of the parents' Judaism. "You have such strong opinions about everything. But now I am right," a grown-up daughter who has chosen ultra-Orthodoxy writes to her mother in Anne Roiphe's novel, *Lovingkindness*. Seeing what her own Judaism has yielded in her child, the mother is left wondering who, indeed, is right.

The bedrock lesson of this book is one that might come from a therapist:

doubting the devout isn't really the problem; it's the doubt we end up feeling about ourselves—and our own brands of Judaism—that needs more attention. Even if you've read none of the books Rubel discusses, hers is a worthwhile reflection on a major cultural divide in contemporary American Judaism.

**RACHEL GORDAN**, who recently completed her Ph.D. at Harvard in American religious history, is now a postdoctoral fellow at Northwestern.

## Scents and Sensuality

### *From the Temple to Today*

Seduction and sexuality are shown in a new light in two unusual books. *The Aroma of Righteousness* (Penn State, \$69.95) by **Deborah A. Green** offers a thorough analysis of the role of aroma and scent in the Bible and in rabbinic thought. Her wide-ranging work touches on linguistics, sociology, anthropology, and archaeology, in addition to text study.

Green begins by looking at spices, their role, and their use in everyday life. She analyzes metaphor and images inherent in smell, lending meaning to our understanding of God, Israel's relation-

**Sandra E. Rapoport**, a lawyer specializing in sexual harassment cases, approaches the Bible through the lens of her work. She retells Bible narratives which focus on women's sexuality, or conversely, the sexual abuse of women, and interweaves the original text with later rabbinic interpretations. Through the stories of Dinah, Tamar, Batsheva, Ruth and Lot's daughters she contends with the motives of both the men and the women. Rapoport thus leads the reader to think more deeply about these women, and to struggle with questions not directly included in the biblical text.

While the result is a beautifully written and highly readable book, I found myself often struggling with the author's approach. Rapoport generally rereads biblical texts through the lens of midrash, traditional rabbinic interpretation. She rejects this approach, however, when, as a woman and a lawyer, she finds the rabbinic interpretations offensive. In several instances she zealously dismisses a midrash because it is not well supported in the biblical text itself, although she does not hesitate to embrace similarly interpretive readings more congenial to her own point of view. For instance,

**The use of spices such as myrrh, cassia, and olive oil in the Temple helped the biblical priesthood to define its authority.**

ship with God, and social structure in Israel itself. This includes the gendered imagery of the woman as a sensual garden in the Songs of Songs, perfumes involved in bathing and anointing, and incense used for ritual purposes. Green shows how the use of spices such as myrrh, cassia, and olive oil in the incense used in the Temple helped the biblical priesthood to define its role and authority, particularly in the stories about the death of Aaron's sons and the rebellion of Korach.

In *Biblical Seductions* (Ktav, \$29.50),

she refutes the rabbinic assertion that the episode commonly known as "the rape of Dinah" could have been consensual on the grounds that the Bible does not explicitly indicate otherwise. While Rapoport's writing reflects her efforts to support Biblical women, at times she seems to lack the biblical and linguistic background to present more fully her case and her readings.

Both of these books are valuable and worthy contributions to the field of biblical studies. They draw new meaning

## The Book on My Nightstand

*Lilith editors tell us what they are reading now—and why*

Right now I'm reading **Elissa Schappell's** *Blueprints for Building Better Girls*, a collection of inter-connected stories that follow the lives of girls and women as they attempt to navigate the fraught minefield of sex, marriage, and motherhood. I've read five of the eight stories in the collection, and am savoring Schappell's astringent tone and wonderfully tart aperçus: "There were pregnant women as far as the eye could see. Young and tattooed, graying and in clogs, fit and over thirty in T-shirts so tight you could see their belly buttons protruding like the stems of pumpkins," is one. "Just a few weeks ago Ronnie had walked in on her with a tube of slice-and-bake Toll House cookie dough, eating it like it was cheese. She'd rather he'd seen her on the toilet." Schappell's eye is sharp and all encompassing. These characters speak for so many of us; it's just that they are brighter, brassier and most honest than most of us could ever dare to be.

YONA ZELDIS MCDONOUGH, FICTION EDITOR

In scouting out books for translation into Hebrew, I recently came across **Ellen Feldman's** *Next to Love* (Spiegel & Grau, 2011), a meticulously-researched novel about the wives of three soldiers in World War II. Babe, the novel's most affecting heroine, works in her local small town Western Union office, where she is responsible for processing the telegrams that "serve as a messenger of the angel of death," informing the families of the deceased. Her husband Claude is the only one of the three to survive the war, though, as she learns, no one survives a war completely intact. Babe's best friend Millie, who loses her beloved husband and the father of her son, remarries a Jewish man named Al Baum; but her son, a victim of anti-Semitic schoolyard prejudices, refuses to take his new father's Jewish last name. Feldman explores the complicated bonds of female friendship, while also taking pains to tell us what everyone is reading in the privacy of their own heads ("She spends the bridge afternoon reading *East of Eden* and feels vaguely guilty about it. Shouldn't she be doing something useful?"); this is a novel for and about readers. A moving, inspiring story of personal transformation, this novel is also a sweeping chronicle of the transformations in American society in the postwar decades. Feldman makes a convincing case for her novel's epigraph: "War, next to love, has most captured the world's imagination."

ILANA KURSHAN, BOOK REVIEWS EDITOR

Although originally published in 2007, I found reading **Grave Matters: A Journey through the Modern Funeral Industry to a Natural Way of Burial** by **Mark Harris** extremely useful and fascinating. While Jessica Mitford's expose of the funeral industry focused on greed, Harris is more concerned with the ecological consequences of our chemical processing of the dead and our unnatural disposal of bodies. While he does deal with the manipulation of the grieving, most of the book is about alternatives to the funeral parlor. He deals with cremation, burial at sea, incorporation of ashes in man-made reefs, doing it all at home, and natural cemeteries. He is respectful of Jewish Orthodox traditions as ecologically superior. Since publication of the paperback in 2008, new green cemeteries have been created and more are in the planning stages as some of us turn away in disgust from the funeral industry.

MARGE PIERCY, POETRY EDITOR

I am an avowed, unabashed fan of **Jeanette Winterson**, who does magical things with words and has been hugely important for queer and women's literature. Her new memoir, *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?* (Grove Press, March, 2012) is the story of her childhood in a working-class English family and her struggle to come to terms with—and come out to—an abusive and obsessively religious mother. As expected, the writing is evocative and raw—"I was beaten as a child and I learned early never to cry. If I was locked out overnight I sat on the doorstep till the milkman came, drank both pints, left the empty bottles to enrage my mother, and walked to school." Winterson relies heavily on the trope of her adoption to explain her subsequent struggles and feelings of displacement, but her writing is foundational and always worthwhile. As she told *The Paris Review* a few years ago, "As well as being a writer neither male nor female, I am a writer who is a woman. I am very conscious of that. I am conscious that the voice does get stronger all the time, the voice of the woman writing."

SONIA ISARD, ASSISTANT EDITOR

from biblical texts, reminding us that approaching the Bible from such varied fields lends holiness to the endeavor and ultimately to the text itself.

**ORA HORN PROUSER** is executive vice president and academic dean of The Academy for Jewish Religion in Riverdale, NY.

## Out of Egypt

### *Feminism in the Levant*

Toward the end of her troubled, troubling memoir of her own and her mother's lives, **Lucette Lagnado** in *The Arrogant Years: One Girl's Search for Her Lost Youth, from Cairo to Brooklyn* (Ecco, \$25.99) finds herself longing for the "absolute protection" and love she experienced as a child

left Cairo, in 1951, when I was eighteen months old.) For Loulou, three intertwined Edens shimmer in her past: colonial Egypt; Orthodox Jewish girlhood; and a daughter's bond with her mother.

But colonial Egypt was in fact a land of corruption and harsh exploitation; while many Jews flourished there, they did so at the price of ignoring the suffering around them. If Lagnado had stayed behind in the women's section she would never have had her career as an investigative journalist. And her mother was in fact debilitated by a devastating marriage to a philandering older man. Lagnado paints her world in broad strokes, and while she manages to draw readers into her sentimental journey "from Cairo to Brooklyn" (and back), she fails to promote any deep-

Kahanoff's work, written for the most part in English and published in Israeli and American journals, has never before been collected in a volume printed in English. So the publication of *Mongrels or Marvels: The Levantine Writings of Jacqueline Shohet Kahanoff* (edited by Deborah A. Starr and Sasson Somekh, Stanford University Press, \$60.00) is an occasion to be celebrated. Although imperfect in many ways, the collection provides English readers access to the work of a pioneering foremother.

Unlike Lagnado, Kahanoff is unambivalently feminist, and she uses her feminism to imagine a transformed Judaism and a transformed larger world. In an early short story, a second-place winner of a 1946 *Atlantic Monthly* fiction contest, she portrays an elderly Egyptian Jewish patriarch deciding to bless his granddaughter with the task of carrying forward the family's heritage: "She was worthy of being a son of his house and as a son he would treat her." But Kahanoff's feminism extends beyond mere personal empowerment; it leads her to imagine radically new alliances. Writing in 1968, meditating on the relationship between Israelis and Palestinian Arabs, she reminds us that while the patriarchal Biblical story of the "enemy brothers" Isaac and Ishmael is often used to justify continuing conflict, "a patriarchal society is not the one most of us would choose to live in today." Accordingly, she shifts the focus to Sarah and Hagar, arguing that "we need not be bound forever by the terms set by our ancient myths and holy scriptures."

Nurtured by her Levantine experience of a world of Jewish-Christian-Muslim interconnection, Kahanoff envisions—and works for, through her politically engaged prose—a new Levantine future. Instead of lamenting paradise lost, Kahanoff points the way forward, suggesting how paradise might be regained by women (and men) willing to work together to create a world without dividers.

**JOYCE ZONANA**, professor of writing and literature at the City University of New York, is the author *Dream Homes: From Cairo to Katrina, an Exile's Journey*.

## Three intertwined Edens shimmer in her past: colonial Egypt; Orthodox Jewish girlhood; and a daughter's bond with her mother.

in the women's section of her Brooklyn synagogue. Although as an adolescent she had resented being behind the wooden divider separating the women from the men—going so far as to organize a stealthy rebellion—Lagnado now questions her own restlessness: "I was part of an entire generation that had escaped dividers," she writes. "We had, together, reached the men's section and exultantly sat down with them to find ... To find what exactly?"

In yearning for the security and stability of her youth, Lagnado frames her new memoir—like her first, the award-winning *The Man in the White Sharkskin Suit*—as a narrative of paradise lost, appealing to the sense of loss and exile inherent in all human life. Lagnado's family left Cairo in 1963, in the face of mounting anti-Semitism, when Lagnado ("Loulou" as she was called and as she calls herself) was six years old. (Like the Lagnados, my own Jewish family also

er understanding of Egypt, Egyptian Jews, or even contemporary feminism, thus squandering the opportunity she earned with her popular first memoir.

In contrast, **Jacqueline Kahanoff**, an Egyptian Jewish writer of an earlier generation (born in 1917, just six years before Lagnado's mother), offers us a nuanced, complex assessment of Egypt, Judaism, feminism, and the State of Israel, an entity startlingly absent from Lagnado's narrative. Kahanoff (née Jacqueline Shohet) immigrated to the U.S. in 1940 at the age of twenty-two. She attended Columbia University and the New School, and began to work as a journalist and writer of fiction. In 1951 she moved to Paris, and in 1954 she settled in Israel, forging a career as a public intellectual committed to an ideal of "Levantinism," in which Christians, Jews, and Muslims—as "free, different, and equal" people—might reinhabit a common "native" space in Israel and throughout the Middle East.

# HAPPENING

## Now at Risk: Historic Advances for Women

"Attacks on women's health care and economic security have raised the stakes for women in the 2012 election," says Nancy K. Kaufman, CEO of National Council of Jewish Women. A coalition of women's organizations including NCJW, representing millions of women, has announced plans to mobilize voters. The list of the top ten historic advances for women now at risk can be found at [msmagazine.com/HERvotes](http://msmagazine.com/HERvotes).

## The Topsy Turvy Bus

Running on used vegetable oil and outfitted to serve as a Jewish environmental education space, the Topsy Turvy Bus is a project of the Teva Learning Alliance. Following tours across the country to California and across the Southeast, the bus—with its enthusiastic Teva staff—is accepting invitations to visit Jewish communities in the New York area this spring to show how individuals can be empowered to "flip environmental damage on its head." [tevalearningcenter.org](http://tevalearningcenter.org)



COURTESY SURPRISE LAKE CAMP

## In Memory of E. M. Broner

Editor Nan Gefen and writer friends Marcia Freedman and Sue Leonard recall the magic-wand-waving, feminist-seder-inspiring, Jewish feminist novelist (*A Weave of Women*) and memoirist (*Mornings and Mourning*) Esther Broner, who died at age 83 in June 2011. You can read their tributes in the Fall 2011 issue of Persimmon Tree, the online magazine that showcases the creativity and talent of women over 60. [persimmontree.org](http://persimmontree.org).

## Moishe House

In about 40 locations across the U.S. and the world, an unusual program supports post-college individuals, leaders in their 20s, who want to create vibrant home-based Jewish communities. They host Shabbat dinners and a variety of their programs in their communal homes. Find out about starting a Moishe House in your area, and see a video created to teach Shabbat blessings at [moishehouse.org](http://moishehouse.org).



## Social Justice Protests in Israel

The Middle East spring bloomed in Israel in June 2011 with a hugely successful Facebook-facilitated boycott of cottage cheese. Then came a social worker strike and a physician strike. When Daphni Leef decided to move into a tent on Rothchild Boulevard in Tel Aviv, she triggered the building of a huge tent city and ongoing protests that included 460,000 people in a single demonstration. Inbal Halperin says this is a movement for human rights and dignity, not a demand to return to the socialist era of Israel's past. Says Maya Rimer, another organizer, "This is the revolution of our generation, and though some people might call it naiveté, there is a joy we haven't had before, a feeling of hope for our future." Follow along at any of these sites: [j14.org.il](http://j14.org.il), [facebook.com/J1mTent](http://facebook.com/J1mTent) or [facebook.com/J14.Israel](http://facebook.com/J14.Israel). A government website asking for change organizations and individuals to work together on cooperative projects is [shituf.gov.il](http://shituf.gov.il).

## A Simple Blood Test to Prevent Family Tragedy

Individuals of every ethnic group are potential carriers of genetic diseases, yet since their own health is not affected, they have no way of knowing this. Ashkenazi Jews have a significantly higher risk for

certain diseases, primarily because members of small isolated Jewish communities in Europe tended to marry each other, enabling gene mutations to become more prevalent in future generations. These diseases, from the more familiar Tay-Sachs to the lesser-known Walker-Warburg Syndrome or Nemaline Myopathy, have no cures and only limited treatment options. Anyone with one Jewish grandparent should be screened. Lois Victor, who lost two children to Familial Dysautonomia, has founded a center that offers resources for screening Jewish genetic diseases. [victorcenters.org](http://victorcenters.org), 877-401-1093. Also visit [jewishgeneticanswers.org](http://jewishgeneticanswers.org).

## Holocaust Survivors and Their Progeny

An e-mail network for Holocaust survivors and their children (2Gs, or "second generation") and grandchildren (3Gs), also includes educators, historians, genealogists, authors, documentarians, filmmakers, staff from Holocaust museums and universities, students from elementary school to graduate school, and other interested individuals. It is a resource for information about the Holocaust and for connecting a worldwide community. Serena Woolrich (née Wolvovits), daughter of a Holocaust survivor father from Transylvania, founded Allgenerations in 1998 to increase tolerance and understanding. [Allgenerations.org](http://Allgenerations.org)



## Endangered Species Condoms

The welfare of human beings is linked to the existence of a vast diversity of wild animals and plants in our world, says The Biodiversity Center, which works to secure a future for all species hovering on the brink of extinction. They do this through science, law and what they call "creative media," to protect the lands, waters and climate that species need to survive. To spark a debate about how overpopulation crowds out species and hastens climate change, they're giving away condoms in colorful packages depicting endangered animals. Check them out at [endangeredspeciescondoms.com](http://endangeredspeciescondoms.com).

## Opening the Way

A women's history walk highlighting Lower Manhattan's rich history of women writers, abolitionists, suffragists and activists as well as three heroes who gave their lives on September 11, 2001, was created by Women's eNews in partnership with Girl Scouts of America. In honor of its 100th anniversary, Girl Scouts can earn an Opening the Way patch by taking the tour on foot, or by interacting with the online elements of the tour which include videos of modern day leaders highlighting the work of women such as Nellie Bly and Sojourner

Truth. You don't have to be a Scout to enjoy. [womensenews.org/opening-the-way](http://womensenews.org/opening-the-way) and [girlscoutsnyc.org](http://girlscoutsnyc.org).

## California Dreaming



"Jewish Life in the Bay Area from the Gold Rush to the Present" features a documentary of contemporary stories of Jewish migration to the Bay Area by filmmaker

Pam Rorke Levy, as well as a series of photographs by local artist and cultural historian Rachel Schreiber. Learn about 160 years of religious reinvention including the first Jewish woman to speak formally from a pulpit, in 1890, Rachel "Ray" Frank, known as The Girl Rabbi of the Golden West. Visitors are invited to add their stories and submit photographs to an ever-evolving community photo wall that can be browsed online or in the gallery. Through October 16, 2012 at San Francisco's Contemporary Jewish Museum, [thecjm.org](http://thecjm.org).

For events and projects taking place between issues of *Lilith*, follow *Lilith* on Facebook and Twitter, check out [Lilith.org](http://Lilith.org), and sign up for *Lilith's* free e-mail newsletter. Send suggestions for this section to [info@Lilith.org](mailto:info@Lilith.org).

—compiled by Naomi Danis

## "Let My People Go!"

This exhibit documenting the Soviet Jewry movement, 1967–1989, illuminates an important chapter in modern Jewish history, the story of Jews in the former Soviet Union who wanted to emigrate but were denied the right to leave. Learn about their efforts to maintain Jewish identity and community life, their struggles with Soviet authorities, and the worldwide support the movement generated. This Beit Hatfutsot exhibition, sponsored by Israel's Ministry of Public Diplomacy and Diaspora Affairs, is on display through March 2012 at the Museum of Jewish Heritage—A Living Memorial to the Holocaust. [mjhnyc.org/v\\_map.html](http://mjhnyc.org/v_map.html)



COURTESY BET HATFUTSOT PHOTO ARCHIVE

# UNDER-THE-NEATH

by ALISHA KAPLAN

A YOUNG WOMAN BECOMES HER GRANDMOTHER'S TEACHER. Though the old woman, now near 90, has lived in Canada for over 60 years, she still speaks with a heavy Hungarian accent and an inverted arrangement of words in which her granddaughter delights. "What for do I need that?" Grandma will ask about a new skirt. "I can make it myself." "Under-the-neath" she will say where the napkin has gone. When her granddaughter calls to say she's on her way for their Tuesday night dinner, "Lovely!" Grandma replies. She often uses the word, and, coming from her wrinkled throat, it always sounds lovely.

"I'm too tired to write," Grandma says to her little girl after *kokosh* cake and *compote*. "That's why you should," replies the young woman. "Write me that story about your Uncle Herman, the one who owned a printing press and book repair shop." Grandma has told her how in the old country people kept things forever so they needed to get the spines of novels reglued and knives sharpened and shoes resoled. "Tell me how he didn't give a book back until he'd read the whole thing." But Grandma says, "For me it is too late."

The young woman comes back the following week. After they clear the table, Grandma hands her a piece of lined paper with her large left-leaning script, barely legible. "I did my homework," she says with pride. The story begins with Grandma's father, a schoolteacher who was born in Serench and killed in Auschwitz. "Serench means luck," Grandma says. The young woman already knows this and knows the town didn't mean luck. The story goes on to list every family member, when they died and how. "Grandma, this isn't what I asked for," she says as kindly as she can. "I have an idea. You can write the one you love to tell about the crazy lady who went around town saying, 'To be beautiful you have to be born beautiful!'"

But when the young woman returns the next Tuesday, Grandma has written the same story—each parent, every uncle and aunt and cousin and neighbor, even the cat who had no name, when and how. ■

Alisha Kaplan's writing has been published in *The Mansfield Revue* and she is a recipient of the Lenore Marshall 2011 Barnard Poetry Prize. She lives in Brooklyn and works at a rare books store.

*"I did my homework," Grandma says with pride.*



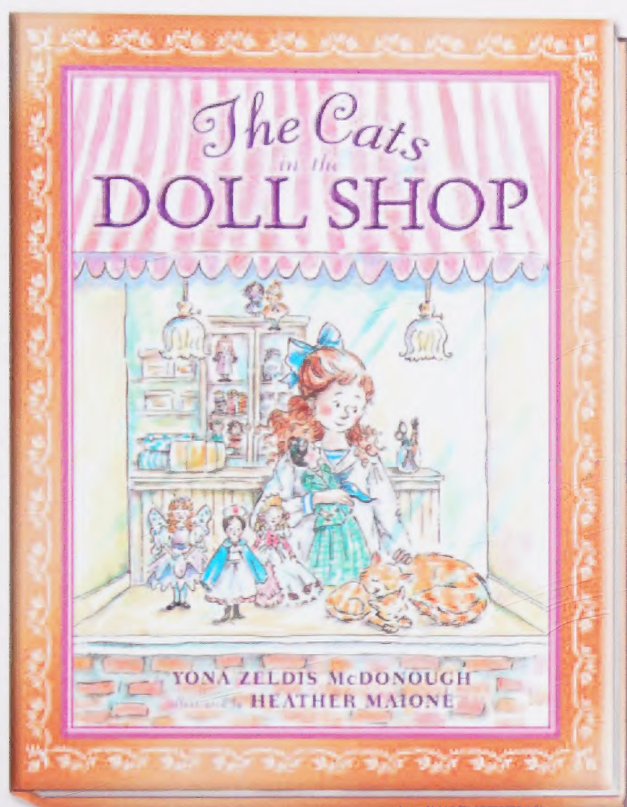
# “A QUIET TREASURE.”

—Kirkus Reviews

## *The Cats* in the DOLL SHOP

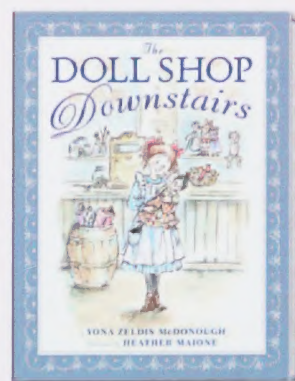
by YONA ZELDIS McDONOUGH  
illustrated by HEATHER MAIONE

When Anna spots a cat in the yard behind her parents' doll shop, she is excited. Then she realizes the cat is about to have kittens—even better! And she has something else to look forward to: her cousin Tania is coming from Russia to stay with Anna's family. Tania doesn't respond to Anna's friendly overtures, but Anna finds a creative way to use her love of dolls and cats to bring everyone together.



IN BOOKSTORES NOW

Look for *The Doll Shop Downstairs*, another charming story about Anna and her sisters



### STELLAR REVIEWS OF THE DOLL SHOP DOWNSTAIRS

★ “[A] standout family-and-doll story.”

—Kirkus Reviews, starred review

★ “Will become a classic.”

—Jewish Book World, starred review



# DON'T MISS ANOTHER GREAT ISSUE! SUBSCRIBE NOW

GOT TO LILITH.ORG OR USE THE CARD INSIDE FOR A SPECIAL DISCOUNT

